

THE MAN FROM
U.N.C.L.E.
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DANGER:
U.N.C.L.E.s
AT WORK!

**THE GENGHIS KHAN
AFFAIR**

A New **NAPOLEON SOLO** and
ILLYA KURYAKIN Novel by
ROBERT HART DAVIS



THE GENGHIS KHAN AFFAIR

BY Robert Hart Davis

From the Great Wall of China to the brooding, silent Kremlin, THRUSH had sent its grim final ultimatum: "Stop U.N.C.L.E., kill Solo and Illya and we rule all Asia. Let them escape and we die to a man!"

ACT I

HOME IS WHERE THE THRUSH FLIES

The mass of humanity that is the Crown Colony of Hong Kong seems to have a double center on either side of Victoria Harbor at the two slips of the Star ferries. The southern center is in Chung Wan, on the island of Hong Kong itself. The northern center is the slip near the railway terminus on the mainland in Kowloon.

From the Kowloon slip the teeming mainland section of the colony spreads out along such streets as Canton and Chatham Roads until it thins out in the heights and the open country toward the Red Chinese border to the north.

Here, at the border, the grim and unsmiling soldiers of The People's Republic of China stand watch before their buildings with the white signs and red stars. Between these two points there are many large houses once owned by the colonial rulers. They are still largely owned by the same people, who are no longer rulers but tend to still rule. On a night in the late fall of 1966, one of these large houses was a blaze of light. The house itself was a Victorian structure with balconies, and French doors that opened out into spacious grounds thickly overgrown with the semi-tropical vegetation.

Every few moments another car drove up to the main entrance: black Rolls-Royce limousines; Cadillac limousines; ancient Daimlers; the dull-brown military staff cars.

The people who left these cars, to be greeted by butlers, footmen, and their distinguished hosts in evening dress, were resplendent in white ties and tails, evening dresses, and uniforms dazzling with the ribbons of medals. Even the civilians wore shining decorations on colored ribbons.

This glittering gathering filled the house and spilled out through the French doors to stand in chattering groups on the stone terrace that

surrounded the house on all sides. Some of the guests even stood on the lawn between the house and the thick undergrowth.

The event was a diplomatic party for the elite of Hong Kong's foreign corps and colony. The host was a high British official, a tall man in full evening dress with the order of The Garter on his chest. The guest of honor was a very different man.

Dr. Li Po Shue was a small slender man with the inscrutable face of the Orient, and the polished manners of a life-long diplomat and man of wealth. Dr. Li's face showed no emotion at all as he chatted in the main ballroom with two American staff officers. But his black eyes glittered and betrayed two facts: one, that he was strangely nervous; and, two, that his mind was really not on the party.

Dr. Li was a vice-president of the Republic of China, better known as Nationalist China, or by its enemies, as Chiang's Formosan regime. In this capacity, Dr. Li was a man of great importance to Hong Kong, and was being handled very gingerly by both the British and American officials.

Despite the evidence of his eyes, Dr. Li was smiling and apparently at his ease in the gay gathering. The eyes that turned to watch him all through the room seemed pleased and satisfied that Dr. Li was enjoying himself.

All but the eyes of one man.

This man was a young man of average height, slim, and with a dark mustache. Dressed in evening clothes, the young man seemed the picture of a rising young diplomat in the American service. He wore thick horn-rimmed glasses, held a martini, and chatted brightly with some of the younger women.

Many people watched him, and smiled. He was a most impeccable young diplomat. Serious but not too serious, and obviously enjoying the association of his superiors. The older men had noted, approvingly, that the young diplomat talked easily and at length but said nothing either serious or stupid.

"Surely you see the need for recognizing the Communist Chinese," a tall, British diplomat said to the young American.

"I see your need," the young man said. "But our need is not yet clear. There are problems."

So the young man talked.

But his eyes were on Dr. Li Po Shue.

He talked, drank, flirted, smiled, and his eyes never really left Dr. Li. He was expert. There were few if any in the crowded room who were at all aware that he had any special interest in the Chinese Vice President. No one noticed that he was never far from Dr. Li.

The evening wore on. The party grew more animated; dinner was served and finished. The dancing began, and the older men drifted into groups, where the conversation became more serious. The tall British host turned just before midnight to find Dr. Li to ask a question.

Dr. Li Po Shue was gone.

The British official frowned. He wondered where he could have gone. But he shrugged it off, and returned to his conversation.

It was at just that instant that the young American with the mustache and glasses also noted the absence of Dr. Li Po Shue. His reaction was different and immediate.

A trifle too abruptly he broke off his conversation and walked quickly from the room out through the French doors. Once in the grounds he broke into a run. He reached the thick bushes and plunged into them, heedless of his elegant evening clothes.

He tore through the thick vegetation, a strange-looking pistol suddenly in his hand. The pistol had appeared as if by magic from beneath his clothes, proving, again, that the young man was more than he seemed.

He ran like a man who knew where he was going, but was not sure what he would find.

He neared the edge of the vegetation around a large open space. He slowed, moved more cautiously. There was a noise to his left.

He whirled just as a giant figure seemed to rise up out of the ground. He had a glimpse of a contorted Chinese face, red-rimmed black eyes, and a long, wicked knife. Then the man was on him.

The giant lunged and seemed to enfold the smaller, slimmer man in evening clothes. A cry of vicious triumph came from the big Chinese.

The cry never finished. The giant gave a strangled choke; his head seemed to snap back as the slim man struck him under the chin with

the heel of his hand. Then the giant hurtled through the air to crash at the base of a tree.

Stunned, the giant Chinese still managed to struggle up.

The strange pistol in the hands of the slender man spat once with a sharp, hissing sound.

The giant collapsed instantly.

The slender man in evening dress continued out into the open space that was filled with the cars of the guests.

He crouched low as he moved across the cars. Near the far side of the mass of cars, close to the exit, he stopped and peered out from behind a black Daimler. What he saw made his eyes narrow.

Dr. Li Po Shue stood there with three other men. They were all Chinese. They spoke quickly, looked back toward the house, and then Dr. Li nodded his head abruptly. The four men all climbed into the black car they stood beside. The car started.

The slender young man turned and ran silently to a small black sports car parked carefully in a place where it could quickly leave the parking lot. He jumped into the small car, and drove off behind the big black car.

He pressed a button on the dashboard of the car and put on a pair of tinted glasses. He smiled. There were no visible lights on his car, no signs of headlights. The car was dark, yet the black car ahead was clearly visible.

The button he had pressed had turned on special infra-red headlights, and the glasses he wore showed the infra-red beams of light as clear as if they were headlights. He had no trouble following the black car while not being seen himself.

But he had other troubles.

He drove with one hand and raised his right hand to his mouth. There was a heavy ring on his finger. He touched it with his thumb, spoke into the ring.

“Sonny here, come in Control Central. Sonny to Control Central.”

A dry, quiet voice seemed to speak in the car. “Control Central. This is Waverly, Mr.---uh---Solo. You have a report?”

"Dr. Li Po Shue has left the party," Napoleon Solo said into the radio-ring. "He is with three other Chinese in a black car driving north from Kowloon. He left without being seen or making his official departure. I was attacked by a man apparently on guard."

"North, you say?" Waverly's dry voice said. "It would seem that our information could be correct. Remain in pursuit, Mr. Solo. I repeat---do not lose Dr. Li."

"No matter where he goes?" Solo asked.

"No matter where Mr. Solo. On his present road he will have to cross the border at point seven---if he crosses. If necessary, you will cross the border also. Is that clear?"

"Very clear," Solo said drily.

"Good. Uh---be careful, Mr. Solo."

There was a faint edge of amusement in the voice from the tiny ring radio as Solo clicked off the transmission. He settled behind the wheel of his car and looked ahead. The black car was moving fast---and steadily northward.

Napoleon Solo sighed. It looked like a long night. He began to peel off his mustache, revealing the handsome and youthful face that could have belonged to almost any rising young businessman or diplomat. But it did not belong to any simple young executive.

It belonged to Napoleon Solo, Chief Enforcement Officer, Section-II (Operations and Enforcement), United Command for Law and Enforcement---better known as U.N.C.L.E.

And it was on U.N.C.L.E. business that Napoleon Solo now drove north from Kowloon toward the border of The People's Republic of China.

The business of saving the world from some new and deadly danger.

TWO

The distant low line of darker shadows in the night were the hills of Kwangtung Province. The faint curve of silver was the Sham Chun River. Ahead, Solo knew, was the iron-railed bridge where the goods train crossed between Hong Kong Colony and the first buildings of The People's Republic.

The black car suddenly turned off the highway. Solo nodded. He had

not expected them to drive straight up to the border posts. Not because The People's Republic would not let them through, because he had a good idea who the three unidentified Chinese belonged to, which side they were on. No, it was the Hong Kong guards Dr. Li Po Shue and his friends did not want to meet---if U.N.C.L.E.'s information was correct.

Solo followed the black car cautiously off the highway. He had to be more careful now, and yet had to follow more closely or risk losing the car. It was not a situation that the U.N.C.L.E. agent liked, but there was nothing else he could do.

It was certain that Dr. Li and his companions would cross the border---if they crossed---at a point on the Sham Chun River. And Solo would have to cross with them!

The agent continued to drive down the dark dirt side road with one hand, while he prepared his special pistol with his right hand. His quarry would have a crossing arranged, and would have friends waiting for them. All Solo would have was himself.

Suddenly he saw the black car stop ahead.

He braked sharply, and at the same instant heard an explosion and felt his car lift into the air. His ears rung, the pressure almost bursting his ear drums. For a second he was aware of being suspended in mid-air, car and all, and then the car crashed down, tilted, shivered and came to rest.

For a split second Solo sat in the car. In that second he mentally checked himself---no damage.

In the next second he was out of the car and into the thick underbrush that bordered the narrow dirt road. His mind worked calmly. Either he had hit a mine, or they had spotted him and used some kind of grenade or bazooka. A mine was not likely here on the Hong Kong side, especially since the road was narrow, and the black car had passed unscathed.

No, it had to have been an attack, which meant that he had been spotted---and also meant that they would be coming to find him soon.

In the bushes Napoleon Solo peered out. His car lay leaning in a ditch at the side of the dirt road. It had been blown some ten feet. Only the specially-built protective flooring had saved Solo. A small crater in the road showed where the explosion had occurred.

And shadows moved along the road.

Shadows with rifles.

Solo watched the figures approach the wreck of his car. A light shined from behind them and a voice called softly. In the light Solo saw the men were Red Chinese soldiers!

A squad of Red soldiers on the Hong Kong side of the border. Which meant that the Red Chinese considered Dr. Li Po Shue very valuable. It also meant that the soldiers would be extra wary and extra ruthless. They would want no witnesses alive to tell what was happening.

Solo watched until the squad was near the wrecked car, and then slipped away into the underbrush. He heard their muttered exclamations behind him when they found the car empty. They would fan out and look for him. But they would not expect him to go where he was going.

He circled and move ahead toward where the black car was parked in the road.

Other soldiers stood guard beside it. To the right of the road, some hundred yards ahead now, he saw faint shadows going down toward the Sham Chun River.

Solo followed as fast as he could while remaining silent. Splashes ahead on the river showed that a boat was moving into shore. Solo slid down the hill and reached the edge of the river. He saw the shadowy figures that waited as the boat moved in.

Solo gripped his pistol. He had to make up his mind in a hurry. He did not want to stop Dr. Li---not yet. And his orders were to follow Dr. Li wherever he went. He nodded to himself and moved forward. He crouched and waited until the figures on shore had all entered the boat. Then, as the boat pushed off, he ran forward in a low crouch to catch hold and be towed across the river.

He was near the boat, about to slip silently into the river, when a voice called urgently from the hill above. A voice that shouted in Chinese.

Napoleon Solo crouched at the edge of the river.

A blinding light suddenly went on in the stern of the boat.

The river and the shore were illuminated like day.

Solo crouched in the full glare of the light---a strange figure in evening clothes with a pistol in his hand.

There were shouts from both the boat and the hill above.

Solo was caught. He could not follow the boat now. He turned swiftly and dove into the cover of the bushes. But he knew how slim his chances were. He was blocked from the river, and they were all over the hill above him. It would be almost impossible to get up the hill without being seen or heard.

But he had done the impossible before.

Low, he moved carefully through the bushes and up the hill at an angle to the left. It was the most dangerous path, and the one they would least expect him to take. He hoped it was the one they least expect.

He heard them all around him in the night. They had lights. Which meant that they could not look for long: the patrols of the Hong Kong Colony would see them.

All he had to do was reach the flat land near the road. Then he---

Napoleon Solo froze. Three Communist soldiers stood directly in his path. In the next instant they saw him. He hurled himself into thicker cover as they opened fire.

Bullets clipped the brush, snapped and crackled like a swarm of angry wasps over his head. On his belly he crawled and fell into a deep depression. His left arm burned and he realized that he had been hit. The fall into the depression twisted his ankle, the pain sharp through the ankle.

But he crawled on along the depression that had turned out to be a small and almost totally hidden gully. He heard the noise of his attackers behind him. He smiled, and started to rise to test his ankle.

A Red soldier stood directly above the ditch a few feet from him. The soldier looked down, rifle pointed. Solo raised his pistol.

"You wouldn't have time, Napoleon," a voice said. "*Tsk, tsk.* You botched this one."

Solo slowly lowered his pistol. The soldier jumped down into the ditch. A small, slender man with black Chinese hair, and Oriental eyes, and a yellowish skin and the clipped accents of a British-trained

voice.

“Illya!” Solo said. “How did---?”

“Waverly contacted me, of course. I rather expected you to make some dazzling approach. You disappointed me,” Illya Kuryakin said. The small, Russian, Number Two man of U.N.C.L.E. Section II grinned through his Chinese disguise. “Is that small man Dr. Li?”

“I followed him here.”

“We’ll, he’s over the border now. So at least we know that he is defecting back to the Reds.”

“I’ve got to follow him,” Solo said.

“Not now. They’re all watching for you. I’ll have to take over. Report to Waverly that---“

The small, disguised Russian stopped. Solo listened, too. Trucks were coming along the dirt road.

“The Hong Kong patrols,” Illya said. “Scream!”

“What?” Solo said.

“Scream---loud! Make it good. Gurgle, too.”

Napoleon Solo screamed.

Illya fired his rifle three times, grunted some vicious oath in Chinese, and leaped to the top of the gully. Solo screamed again, groaned, and lay in the gully.

Feet pounded in the night. Solo heard the other Red soldiers run up. He heard guttural words in Chinese, and heard Illya tell the others that he, Illya, had killed the spy---the dog of a spy. One voice wanted to look---the officer, no doubt. Solo tensed. Then he heard Illya say that a man hit three times does not live---and the Hong Kong patrols were approaching.

There was a tense moment, and then the Red soldiers moved away toward the river. Solo waited for a few minutes, then stood and climbed out of the gully. In an instant he was surrounded by men in British uniforms.

“Hold it! Right there!”

Solo raised his hands. Lights shone on him and revealed him in his evening clothes. Solo smiled politely.

“I seem to have lost my way,” the U.N.C.L.E. agent said. “Is there a party around somewhere?”

They stood there and stared at him.

THREE

The Hong Kong headquarters of U.N.C.L.E. are on Victoria Street in Kennedy Town, on the island of Hong Kong itself. They are hidden behind the simple façade of an Indian restaurant. There is an actual restaurant on the first floor, operated by a real Indian from Bombay, who is also the second-in-command of U.N.C.L.E. in the area.

The second floor, which is a storage area, is actually not the second floor at all. It is the third floor. The second floor does not exist.

Except that it does exist, and is the actual headquarters complex. It contains the communications rooms, the file rooms, the weapons rooms, and all the other materiel of an U.N.C.L.E. area headquarters, and it is entered through a closet in the kitchen of the restaurant.

The closet is a clever and highly secret elevator. No one who entered the elevator could ever leave it without complete identification. It opens into a small reception room where the receptionist, a beautiful Chinese girl, is armed with two pistols and a button that closes all doors and releases a sleep gas.

Just behind this reception area is a small and neat office. This is the special office reserved for the members of Section I, the ultimate leaders of U.N.C.L.E. At this moment the special room was doubly in use---two Section-I men were there: Alexander Waverly, from New York; and Kalil Rajit Singh, from Calcutta. Two of the five men who ran U.N.C.L.E., and with them was Napoleon Solo.

“I suppose it couldn’t be helped, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said, “but it was a little embarrassing with the Hong Kong authorities.”

Solo suppressed a grin. The Hong Kong officials had had a bad time with the agent-in-evening-dress caught at the border. There were probably a lot of confused junior officers after Solo was quietly and discretely spirited away and turned over to U.N.C.L.E.

“At least, Alexander, we know that Dr. Li has defected, and your agent Kuryakin is close to him,” Kalil Rajit Singh said.

Waverly frowned. "That will not be enough, I'm afraid, Kalil."

The New York Chief of U.N.C.L.E. puffed on his pipe. The pipe was out, and Waverly began to search his pocket for a match. His iron grey hair, and frowning face, gave him the appearance of an ageing bloodhound. Which in a way he was: he had spent his life in the work of espionage, for his native country and later for U.N.C.L.E. But he was also the brilliant mind that had conceived much of the methodology of U.N.C.L.E.

"One man cannot operate in China efficiently," Waverly went on. "No, we must activate plan two for Mr. Solo."

Solo gave his gruff Chief a lighter. Waverly lighted his pipe, puffing speculatively.

"So far, Kalil, it is all happening as you suspected," Waverly said.

The serious Indian Section-I man nodded. "I had, as I explained, definite word that Li Po Shue was going to return to the mainland and throw in his lot with the Reds after all these years. It seems he had decided that the future of China does lie with Mao's Government."

"He may be right," Waverly said. "But that is beside the point now. You're sure of your information Kalil?"

"Absolutely," Kalil Singh said.

Solo broke in. "But, we know Li has gone back! We know he is inside China now. I saw---"

Kalil Singh shook his head. "No, Mr. Solo, Li Po Shue is not inside Red China. And he never will be."

Solo blinked. "Not inside---"

Waverly puffed smoke into the quiet office. "We have reason to think that Dr. Li Po Shue is dead, Mr. Solo."

"Dead?" Solo said, gaped. "But I followed him all last night!"

"No. You followed an impostor, Mr. Solo," Kalil Singh said. "We thought that, but it was better that neither you nor Mr. Kuryakin know that we knew, in case you were caught. I have all but conclusive information that the real Dr. Li is dead, killed by those who supplied the carbon copy of him."

"In short, killed by THRUSH," Waverly said quietly. "Yes, their fine

hand is behind it. I take it the impostor was very good?"

"Perfect," Solo said. "I'd studied Dr. Li in films for weeks. He fooled me, and everyone at the party."

"Including men who may have known Li Po Shue for many years," Kalil Singh said. "THRUSH is an efficient organization, as we all know."

"We believe the imposter is one of their top men, perhaps even a Council member," Waverly said. "In fact, we know a great deal. What we don't know, I'm afraid, is *why*? THRUSH does not go to so much trouble without a good reason. The question is, what are they up to?"

"Dr. Li would be welcomed with open arms," Solo said. "He'd probably be given a high job."

"Without question," Waverly said. "But not a top job," Kalil Singh said. "He would not be trusted at a policy level, never. No, he would be *used*. They will put him in some position where his skill can be used by the Mao regime, and where the eyes of the world would be on him. They would want to exploit his return to mainland China."

"Yes, I'm sure they would," Waverly said thoughtfully.

Solo rubbed his chin and looked at the two Section-I men. His arm still hurt from where the bullet had grazed, and his ankle was heavily taped, but he could walk on it, and he was anxious to get back to work. Illya Kuryakin was alone somewhere deep in the heart of China.

"But Dr. Li is a politician, a diplomat," Solo said. "Where could they use him except at the policy level?"

"That is what we must learn, Mr. Solo," Kalil Singh said. "Or rather, what you must learn."

Waverly studied his pipe, which had gone out. The chief knitted his bushy eyebrows. "You see, Mr. Solo, Dr. Li is a diplomat, a vice president of National China, but he is, or was, also a noted electronic scientist. As a matter of fact he is, or was, a specialist on ballistic missile guidance systems."

"You think the Reds want to use him to develop ballistic missiles now that they have atomic capability?" Solo said.

"Almost certainly, Mr. Solo," Waverly said drily. "That is what the Red Chinese would do with Dr. Li---but they do not have Dr. Li. So the

question is what does THRUSH want to do with the false Dr. Li? It is highly doubtful that an impostor is as expert as Dr. Li was. I think our impostor would not be able to develop missile systems, but he probably knows enough about them to get by.”

“Which leaves us still in the dark as the THRUSH’s purpose,” Kalil Singh said. “They have gone to much trouble to get a man into China at a high level.”

“And THRUSH never goes to trouble without a lot to gain,” Napoleon Solo said. “I think I better get into China this time.”

“I think you had better, Mr. Solo. The last report from Mr. Kuryakin indicated that he was still in the unit assigned to Dr. Li, and is in Peking. He is doing what he can, but in his present disguise he is somewhat limited. We must have a man who can get close to Dr. Li,” Waverly said.

“You want Plan Two for China entry?” Solo said.

“I think Plan Two, yes. Your Albanian is now good enough?” Waverly said.

“I’ve been working with the knowledge accelerator for a month,” Solo said. “I wouldn’t fool an Albanian for long, but I think I can play the part of the missile expert.”

Kalil Singh frowned. “It will be risky, Alexander. Perhaps I have a Section-II man who is fluent in Albanian.”

“The Chinese have few who speak Albanian, Kalil,” Waverly said. “No, we need our best man, and Mr. Solo is probably that. He will know enough Albanian to convince the Chinese, and then he can use French, English, or Russian, which most of the leaders know. He speaks four or five Chinese dialects, which will be vital in learning what is going on.”

Kalil Singh nodded. “Very well, Alexander. I will have the section prepare the proper papers, and arrange the route.”

“Do that, Kalil,” Waverly said, and looked at Solo as he sucked on his cold pipe. “By tonight, Mr. Solo will be the Albanian missile expert en route to Peking by way of Kabul.”

Solo grinned. “Let’s hope I make it.”

“Yes, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said. “Let us hope you do better than you did

in crossing the Sham Chun River.”

Solo's grin weakened, but the boyish agent shrugged, and left the secret room to begin the arduous preparations that would make him an Albanian missile expert.

FOUR

Peking is an old city. It has seen many wars and has had many names. A city of walls, it has, under the rule of The People's Republic, expanded far beyond the northern Inner City and the southern Outer City. Residential suburbs sprawl to the north and northwest here at the apex of the north China plain. The universities have risen beyond the ancient walls, and industrial centers smoke and hum a few feet from ancient statues of the times of long forgotten emperors.

In the city there are six artificial lakes fed from a moat outside the walls of the Inner City. Grouped around the Chung Hai (Middle Lake) and Nan Hai (South Lake) are the buildings of the Chinese People's Government. It was here, on a dark night a few days after Napoleon Solo had been frustrated at the border, that three black cars drove silently up to one of the government buildings.

The cars stopped and three men stepped out of the second car. One of these men was the small Dr. Li Po Shue. The other two were men in the uniforms of People's Republic generals. The three entered the building through a small side door.

From the other two cars a group of people emerged. Most were soldiers, armed and alert as they watched in all directions along the dark street. From time to time there were loud noises, the shouts of many voices, from the direction of the old Legation Quarter where there were now many hotels, stores, theaters and movie houses.

“The Red Guards are active again,” one of the soldiers said to his companion.

The companion, a small, dark man, answered in the same northern dialect. “They have nothing to do, comrade.”

But this small man was not really listening to his fellow soldier. He was watching the door through which Dr. Li had gone with the generals, and he was watching a group of three men and a woman who stepped out of the first car.

Illya Kuryakin stared at the woman and three men. There was

something familiar about them. But Illya could not for the moment place them, and he again turned his attention to the small door. Somehow he had to get inside.

But there was no way without risking his disguise. Still, he was about to take that chance, when the door opened again, and the small figure of Dr. Li came out with the two generals. Behind them, inside the doorway, Illya had a glimpse of another man---a heavy-set man with a round moon face who was only too familiar!

Illya stared at the half hidden figure of Chairman Mao himself!

Only for a moment; then the Chinese ruler was gone. But in that glimpse Illya had realized that Dr. Li Po Sue was not operating at a low level. The Chairman had waved once, as if to wish Dr. Li luck in whatever he was to do.

Illya had time to see no more. The leaders and soldiers climbed back into their cars and the three car motorcade drove off again in the dark night. Soon they were driving through more crowded streets where the mobs of young and eager Red Guards chanted and shouted their devotion to the new way. The cars drove out of the walled cities, through the brighter streets of shops and theaters, and into the newer suburbs where the factories operated even now at night. They passed the main railroad terminus, and continued on into complete industrial areas, and then into the more open land far to the north.

At last the three cars pulled up before a large, dark building that stood isolated beside a double railroad spur. The generals and Dr. Li got out and walked into the building. The soldiers were dispersed to guard. The group of three men and a woman, all non-Chinese, followed Dr. Li and the generals into the building.

Illya Kuryakin walked his post at the western corner of the giant building. His keen eyes watched, and his mind analyzed the situation. His post was distant from the entrance to the vast building. The guards were not walking post, not reporting. They were simply on watch. The officer was lounging against one of the cars.

Illya studied the façade of the building. It appeared to be a warehouse, and a row of windows ran some six feet up all along the walls. Illya looked again toward the officer. The man was lighting a cigarette, talking to the sergeant. Illya decided to risk leaving his post.

He moved quickly to the wall of the building, and took two small, round objects from under his uniform. He wet them, and struck them

firmly against the wall. They stuck fast, and each one had a four inch metal bar that folded out into a projection. Illya climbed onto them and his shoulders reached above the bottom of the windows.

The small Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent quickly cut a hole in a window pane with a tiny diamond-tipped cutter, reached in, opened the window, climbed through and dropped to the floor. He crouched in the dark interior and listened. There was no sound.

His eyes grew accustomed to the dark. He saw that he was in a smallish store room of some type. There were crates piled to the ceiling. Illya examined the crates and found that they contained sub-machine gun ammunition, and were destined, according to the *Russian* lettering, for Viet Nam!

That the Soviet was supplying Viet Nam by way of China was not news, and Illya crossed the room to the door. He listened. He heard voices---but not far away, indistinct, and strangely echoing. Cautiously he tried the door. It was not locked. He opened it a crack and looked out. What he saw made him mutter in sudden surprise.

The area he looked into was as high and large as an aircraft hangar. It was most of the building, and the railroad tracks ran into it from the outside. It was dim, but with just enough light for Illya to see the generals and Dr. Li deep in conference on the far side.

And enough light for him to see the two giant rocket-missiles that rested on railroad flat cars in the center of the vast building. Illya knew instantly what they were. Soviet-made, IRBM missiles (Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles). Powerful, accurate, with a range of some 1500 miles, perhaps more, and full atomic capability!

But why?

Illya stared out at the rockets. The relations between the Soviet Union and China was not such that the Russians would send missiles to China!

Then why were they here in Peking?

Illya let his deep-set eyes carefully survey the giant warehouse room, and then crept out and moved quickly toward the rockets. He reached them unseen, and moved along beneath the towering flat cars. He found what he wanted near the tall tail assembly. In Russian there was a simple legend: *Depot 14. Hanoi.*

The same was repeated in Vietnamese and Chinese.

The IRBM's were destined for the Hanoi Government of Ho Chi Minh. Which was a dangerous escalation of the Viet Nam War! With such missiles, Hanoi could threaten the whole free-world in Asia!

And yet---Hanoi had no atomic warheads!

Still, as a token of Soviet faith in Hanoi, the IRBM's with conventional warheads would be dangerous weapons that could be used on Saigon as a morale-shattering attack.

They could be used on the American Fleet off the Vietnamese shore!

Illya felt rather than saw the man behind him. He tensed, waited, his ears alert. There was a soft step close behind, a pause, and then sensed the lunge. Illya dived aside, turned in midair, his pistol in his hand.

The man wore civilian clothes and carried a knife. He was still in the act of plunging the knife into Illya's back---but Illya was no longer there. The man had time to open his mouth and no more.

Illya's silent shot struck the man full in the throat. The man dropped without a sound. Illya crawled to the fallen man, already dead from the deadly poisoned dart Illya had loaded in his pistol for this mission.

Illya searched the body quickly. He found the identity card. A Chinese secret policeman! Illya bent and picked up the man. He carried him silently through the giant warehouse to the small storage room. He hid the body inside a packing case.

The man would not be found for days. Illya turned to climb back through the window.

He stopped.

There was a sudden loud noise back inside the warehouse. Illya returned to the door. The two giant IRBMs were being moved out by a small switch engine. Dr. Li and the two generals were watching.

Illya went back across the small storeroom and climbed up and out the window. He dropped to the ground, took his two suction discs from the wall, and returned to his post.

All was quiet. Illya smiled, and bent over his ring radio.

FIVE

Napoleon Solo rode down Chatham Road in Kowloon to the Peninsula

Hotel. He left the taxi a block from the hotel and walked the rest of the way. He did not go in the main entrance, but went down an alley at the side and into the side door.

He went up the service stairs until he reached the third floor. There he stepped carefully out into a corridor, surveyed the deserted hall, and walked quickly to a room where he let himself in with a key.

Inside the room he locked the door behind him, smiled, and sat down at a table. The room had been rented in the name of Mehemet Shenhu, a supposed member of an Albanian Mission to Hong Kong who had remained in the Crown Colony when his mission left for Tokyo.

Mehemet Shenhu was, of course, an U.N.C.L.E. agent in Tirana, and Solo was to return to the Albanian capital in his place. Once there he would fly out as the Albanian expert on missiles, and be in Peking in a day and a half.

He glued on the drooping mustache, darkened his hair, carefully thickened his nose, and sat back to study the effect. He grinned. His own mother would not know him. With a red *fez*, since he was a Muslim, and a baggy Albanian suit, he would pass.

He checked his watch. In twenty minutes he would leave the hotel to catch his jet. He checked his weapons and the secret devices every U.N.C.L.E. agent carried for any emergency that might arise.

The audible alarm on his pencil radio began to sound.

Solo answered. "Sonny here. Come in Control Central."

Waverly's voice was calm, yet urgent for the slow-speaking chief. "Mr. Solo, we have just received a relayed report from Mr. Kuryakin. He reports that Dr. Li appears involved in some action concerning Soviet IRBM missiles. These missiles are in Peking, and seem to be destined for Hanoi."

"Soviet missiles in China and going to Hanoi?" Solo said, his voice surprised. "That doesn't sound logical."

"No, Mr. Solo, it does not sound logical. I cannot see what interest THRUSH would have in such a matter, in any event. It is now urgent that you reach Peking quickly. We must find out what is really behind those missiles!"

"Roger," Solo said. "I'm leaving in ten minutes."

“Very good. You will be met in Tirana, the usual recognition signals plus the code for the day: *The Red Guard is active*, and the reply. *It’s a full moon.*”

“Roger,” Solo said.

His pencil radio went silent. The boyish agent frowned for a moment. Waverly was right, there was something more behind this than missiles for Hanoi, some scheme of THRUSH that would be more deadly than any missiles in Hanoi.

He looked at his watch. It was time. His pistol in place, the thermite foil and the smoke bombs concealed, Solo left the room a different man than the agent who entered. In his red *fez* and disguise he rode down in the elevator and checked out.

He saw them as he crossed the lobby.

Three men, Europeans, casually blocking the door. The bulge of a weapon was clear beneath the tropical suit coat of the tallest. Without breaking stride, Solo turned to the left and entered the hotel bar. Solo laid money on the bar and left the suitcase. He walked to the men’s room. Once in the men’s room he unlocked the second door he knew was there and went out, into the alley.

He walked casually up the alley.

Two more men stood at the exit from the alley. Solo turned back before they saw him. Now it was clear that they had all exits covered, the other end of the alley would be blocked also. Midway along the alley he spotted a door into the next building. It was locked.

He used his concealed picklock and went inside.

He stood in a corridor of some kind. He could hear the sound of office machines and typewriters. He concentrated and remembered that the ground floor of the building was occupied by a travel agency.

He was apparently in a storage area.

Cautiously he moved along the dim corridor until he came to where it opened, without a door, into a large office, where pretty girls typed or talked to customers at a long counter. As he was about to step out he saw the three men come into the travel agency.

He flattened against the wall of the corridor. He tried to recall the layout of the building. There should be another exit at the street side

on the street behind the Peninsula Hotel. He turned and went back along the corridor until he came to a cross corridor.

He was halfway along this cross corridor toward what he was sure was a fire door that could only be opened from the inside, when a door suddenly opened beside him.

Napoleon Solo whirled, his U.N.C.L.E. Special in his hand.

Something stung his neck.

Solo froze with his pistol in his hand, and then there was nothing at all. A black void into which Solo seemed to fall down and down with faces grinning at him.

ACT II

THE HAWK OR THE PIGEON?

Napoleon Solo came awake slowly. First the black void seemed to grow lighter, turn grey and then a pale white. He did not open his eyes.

He tested his muscles, moved his arms and then his feet. He was not paralyzed or bound. He seemed to be seated on some hard surface. A metal chair of some kind.

Ready, Solo opened his eyes.

He was in a bright room with flat grey walls. There were no doors or windows. There seemed to be no ceiling. He saw two men across the room with their backs to him. To their left he saw a man and a woman. No one was watching him!

He gathered his muscles and leaped sideways out of the metal chair.

Only he did not leap.

A horrible pain struck his back and his legs and he sprawled in a heap on the floor. He ground his teeth against the pain. Slowly it eased, and Solo opened his eyes again and looked up. They were all standing over him with guns in their hands. The woman laughed. "How do you like our new chair, Napoleon?"

"Very nice," Solo said from the floor.

He looked up at the woman. "Hello, Maxine. We do seem to run into each other."

“You’re my favorite assignment, Napoleon dear,” Maxine Trent said. She waved her pistol to the three men with her. “Put him back into the chair.”

Solo was lifted and placed back into the chair. He looked at it with interest. It did not appear to have any wires. Maxine smiled. The tall, beautiful THRUSH agent waved her pistol at the chair.

“One of our little toys, Napoleon,” Maxine said. “No wires, no ropes, no messy drugs. But if you try to get up it knocks you down. I can also control it, see?”

The agonizing pain shot through Solo’s legs and up into his body. The agent cried out, and twisted in the metal chair. The pain went away, and Solo sat there sweating in the grey-walled room that had no windows, door or furniture other than the metal chair itself.

“So you know you can’t escape. Right, Napoleon?” Maxine said.

“I know I can’t escape,” Solo said.

“Good,” the violet-eyed Maxine said, her six-foot frame, with all the curves exactly where they should be, bending toward Solo. “Then you will tell us all you know about Dr. Li Po Shue.”

“Doctor who Po what?” Solo said innocently.

Maxine sighed. “Really Napoleon, give us some credit. We trapped you like a chicken in a net. We know Waverly and Kalil Singh are both here in Hong Kong. They don’t come to an area headquarters unless they know something important is happening. We know that you watched, and followed, Dr. Li as far as the Sham Chun River. So, you know something. Now we want to know what it is.”

“Waverly and Kalil Singh here?” Solo said. “I really wish people would tell me what’s going on. I---“

The agonizing pain contorted Solo’s body again. When it ceased he sat shivering with sweat. Then he smiled.

“You know better than this, Maxine. What will your superiors say if they hear you’re trying such crude methods?”

Maxine nodded. “Of course, I’m just, shall we say, softening you up. And I have no superiors, Napoleon. This one is all mine.”

Solo raised an eyebrow. “Yours? Are you on the Council now, Maxie?”

“Just about, dear Napoleon. They’ve moved me way up, thanks partly to you,” Maxine said proudly.

“To me? Well I’m glad to be of service,” Solo said.

“You defeated so many area leaders, killed off so many of our people. They had to move me up, I’m still going. Survival and success, that’s how to get ahead.”

“In THRUSH?”

“Anywhere, Napoleon. Now I have my own area, and the Dr. Li project is all mine. But I must know what U.N.C.L.E. knows, or thinks they know. I won’t offer you a chance to join us again, although I could do a lot to start you off high up now, Napoleon.”

“Don’t offer, Maxine. I’m afraid the way of getting ahead in THRUSH makes it a bit too dangerous as a career,” Solo said.

“We’re simply realists, Napoleon. You in U.N.C.L.E. tend to be sentimental. That’s why we’ll win in the end.”

“With Dr. Li and those missiles?” Solo said.

Maxine nodded. “Yes, with those, miss...”

The tall beautiful Woman stopped. Behind her three men muttered. Maxine stared at Solo with a coldness now in her violet eyes.

“Tricks, Napoleon? So, you know that we are concerned with those missiles, but I now know that you at least connected Dr. Li to the missiles. Now you will tell me everything that you know, and Waverly knows.”

“You know I won’t, Maxine,” Solo said with a grin, but his eyes were as firm as Maxine’s eyes.

The tall, beautiful woman watched Solo for a moment with those violet eyes Solo had once seen under better conditions. Then she, too, smiled. She waved to her men. As if this was the signal they had been waiting for, the three sprung into action.

One went behind Napoleon Solo and wheeled out a tape recorder.

The other two left the grey room. Solo watched them. He saw a portion of the wall open as if by itself. The men went through and the wall closed. Solo had not seen them touch anything. The exit was apparently operated completely from the outside. Which meant that

somewhere in the walls was a one-way window through which the room was under observation.

“Progress is a wonderful thing, Napoleon. Don’t you agree?” Maxine said.

“I’m all for it,” Solo said. “I gather you’re trying to tell me something.”

“I am, Napoleon. You see, I know that your subconscious is programmed to answer only gibberish under a trust serum, and I know, of course, that torture will probably not work. Our Council knows that, too.”

“So?” Solo said warily.

“So we’ve come up with an answer. We’ve made progress,” Maxine said.

The wall opened again and the two men returned. They carried a small bottle and hypodermic. Solo looked at the bottle and hypodermic. The two men began to prepare the syringe.

Maxine watched them, smiled at Solo. “You see, Napoleon, your programming works because the truth serums short-circuit your conscious mind and bring the subconscious up. You lose conscious control. The problem was to find a way to make you want to tell us, you see?”

“A nice trick if you can do it,” Solo said.

“But we have,” Maxine said. “It’s really quite beautiful. This little drug won’t hurt you at all. It leaves you in perfect control, conscious, sane, fully awake, even cheerful. Your subconscious never even becomes aware of what’s happening, so the programming doesn’t operate, see?”

And just what is happening?” Solo said.

“Why, you’re telling us everything we want to know---of your own free will!” Maxine said. “Or, to be accurate, without your will. You see, the drug saps your will, it makes you love us, want to tell us what we ask.”

“I doubt it,” Solo said.

“Really? Well, suppose we find out, eh?” Maxine said.

The tall woman nodded to her men. One turned on the tape recorder. The other two stepped to Solo. The agent felt the needle go in. The

other men stepped back. The man on the tape recorder bent over his dials. Maxine watched intently.

“What does Waverly know about Dr. Li Po Shue?” Maxine said softly.

Solo opened his mouth to laugh. The laugh did not come. He felt a sudden wave of peace, of quiet. Maxine looked very lovely. He smiled at Maxine. He felt limp, almost jelly, and yet was aware of Maxine and the others. They were pleasant people. “I won’t---” Solo began.

He knew that he must not tell. The question was not one that could be answered. But...

“Waverly knows that Dr. Li Po Shue is dead,” Solo said.

“Where is the man who says he is Dr. Li?”

“In Peking,” Solo said, aware that he must not say it.

“How did you learn that?”

“Our key man in Peking, he sent a lengthy---“

Solo talked on. The tape recorder wound slowly taking down all the words of the helpless agent.

TWO

Alexander Waverly and Kalil Singh sat in the secret room of the Hong Kong Headquarters of U.N.C.L.E. and continued to plan and analyze the situation of Dr. Li Po Shue.

“Solo should report in shortly,” Waverly said. “We can give him the latest news on the real Dr. Li.”

“Yes,” Kalil Singh said. “There is no doubt that the real Dr. Li is dead, and that he was in THRUSH hands before he died. I think---“

A bell sounded suddenly in the Section-I room, low and urgent. Kalil Singh sat up straight and rigid. Waverly pressed a button.

“Yes, Waverly here!”

“Security officer Tanaka,” a voice snapped. “I am receiving a sensor warning signal, Code Six drug alarm.”

“From which agent?” Waverly snapped.

“Agent Napoleon Solo,” The security officer replied.

“Wait there! Kalil!” Waverly said quickly. Kalil Singh was already at the door of the secret Section-I room. The Indian and Waverly walked swiftly along the quiet corridor of the hidden headquarters to a sealed door. They presented their badges to the scanner, and held up their hands. There was a momentary pause. Waverly fumbled for his pipe, nervous. Then the door slid open, their identification checked and found proper.

Inside the room a tall Japanese man sat at an intricate console. The Japanese, security officer Tanaka, did not speak but simply pointed to his console where a small red light glowed. There was no other light on the board.

“How long has it been signaling?” Kalil Singh asked.

“About two minutes and ten seconds,” Tanaka said. “I may have missed a few seconds. It is the first time we’ve used the device in this---“

“Very well,” Waverly snapped, his brooding eyes riveted to the little red light. “Send for the communications officer, quickly!”

Tanaka made the call. Then the tall Japanese turned to look at Waverly.

“He will be here in ten seconds, sir.”

Waverly nodded, searching for a match for his pipe, his gaze still fixed on the small red light.

“Exactly how does it work, sir?” Tanaka said. “As I said, it is new to me.”

Waverly said nothing. Kalil Singh spoke.

“It is a small sensor electrode implanted in the brain of the agent. When the agent is administered some drug that makes him talk against his will, or against his programming, the sensor sends out an immediate signal that can be picked up for fifty miles. We are working on a better range,” the Indian said.

“So this means that Solo is captured and talking?” Tanaka said.

“I’m afraid it does,” Kalil Singh said.

“Ah,” Waverly said as a small Chinese entered the room. “You are the

communications officer?"

"Dr. Ch'en Wu," Kalil Singh said.

"I want an immediate fix on the source of the signal that is lighting that light," Waverly said.

The Chinese U.N.C.L.E. agent looked at the light. "A brain sensor beam?"

"Yes---and hurry, man!" Waverly said.

"Immediately, sir," Dr. Ch'en Wu said.

The Chinese agent turned and left the room at a run. Kalil Singh watched the red light. Waverly smoked. The Indian Section-I leader coughed lightly. Waverly looked up at him.

"Perhaps we had better alert anyone involved," Kalil Singh said.

"Alert?" Waverly said.

"He is talking, Alexander," the Indian said. "We must change all security here and in New York. Alert all personnel he has knowledge about. There is no way of knowing just what they will ask. Luckily, he knows little about the operation here."

Waverly nodded. "Forgive me, Kalil, I apologize. Of course, we must alert Mr. Kuryakin immediately! Anyone else. Tanaka, you have Mr. Solo's file. Examine it and put all security measures into effect. But first get the word through to Mr. Kuryakin, he must change his disguise and cover!"

The door opened again and the small Chinese communications officer came back. "The location of the source is ten miles from here, sir, in a warehouse on the docks on Canton Road. The height appears to indicate the third floor. I have the security agents alerted and ready. There is a truck and a car."

"Good," Waverly said. "Come!"

The grey-haired Chief moved with amazing speed as he led the forces of U.N.C.L.E. out of their secret headquarters and into the truck and the car. The truck and car moved swiftly through the city. Waverly looked at his watch. Less than four minutes had passed since he had been alerted. A total of some seven minutes in all since the original signal had first come in. They would not have had time to ask all their

questions by far.

Or would they?

Perhaps they had not wanted more than the few facts U.N.C.L.E. knew about Dr. Li Po Shue. If so, they would have picked Solo's mind clean by now, and disposed of him by now.

Waverly's bushy brows knotted grimly. No. THRUSH, with Napoleon Solo in their hands and helpless, would not be able to resist learning everything they could.

A faint smile flickered across the impassive face of the U.N.C.L.E. leader. Waverly had made the study of THRUSH a large part of his life's work, and he knew the one great weakness of that secret and powerful organization---the violent internal competition and greed for personal position.

THRUSH believed that this internal struggle was their strength, but it was actually their weakness because it made them lose sight of the true purpose. And Waverly was sure that whoever had Solo would lose sight of the immediate purpose and want to learn *all* Solo knew in order to have as many of U.N.C.L.E.'s secrets as possible---personally.

Waverly hoped that this was true---it might be all that would save Napoleon Solo this time.

"There it is, Alexander," Kalil Singh said quietly.

Waverly nodded and looked out at the silent warehouse at the edge of Victoria Harbor. Then, quickly, he gave his calm, precise orders to his men. They listened, nodded, and began to slip along the quiet street toward the warehouse.

THREE

Evening had come again to Peking, and Illya Kuryakin stood at rigid attention in the Spartan office inside the grim Government building. To any observer, Kuryakin, in his disguise as a soldier of the People's Army, was a picture of correct discipline. But his shrewd, quick eyes missed nothing of the meeting in the office.

Dr. Li Po Shue was seated across the desk from the small, soft-eyed woman who looked like a pleasant Chinese grandmother, but who was, in fact, neither pleasant nor soft. She probably was a grandmother, though, Illya thought. The Communist women leaders made something of a fetish of being normal women, and

grandmothers seemed to make excellent second-in-command bureaucrats.

This one Illya knew only too well---Madame Chu Ting, widow of General Chu Ting, and closest aide to Madame Mao herself. One of the Communists strongest assets---the unknown, quiet non-ambitious second-line leaders who let their chiefs take all the public attention and public risk. Without such second-line leaders, Communism would have drowned in its own turmoil long ago. The strength of Communism was not its Chou en Lai's or its Stalins, but its Kaganovitches, its Mikoyans, and its Madame Chus.

"You can prepare the intermediate missiles for immediate operational installation, Dr. Li?" Madame Chu said quietly.

"Yes," Dr. Li said simply.

"Good," Madame Chu said. "We are very fortunate to have you with us, Dr. Li."

"I belong where my country's destiny lies, Madame," Dr. Li said. "It is now clear to me where that is."

The other two silent men in the room seemed to watch Dr. Li with more than a little suspicion. Illya Kuryakin, rigid and remote as he was supposed to be, a creature without eyes or ears, studied the two other men.

They were a puzzle. One was General Teng Tu'Sian, a known proponent of Mao and properly here. But the other was General Po Soong Teh, a strong opponent of Mao. What were the two generals doing together here? Watching each other? Unsure of just where Dr. Li would stand, and so each group wanting a man with the Nationalist defector?

And where did THRUSH fit in? Did anyone in this room know that Dr. Li was not Dr. Li but a THRUSH impostor? Illya did not have time to get an answer.

"It is always good to have one's destiny clear," General Po said drily. "But I suggest we begin. Speed is essential in this matter."

"For once we agree," General Teng said. The Mao-man nodded to the anti-Mao General Po. "Time is our most important factor now. We must impress the Americans with our atomic delivery potential."

"And our Russian comrades General?" General Po said.

“The revisionist Russians need impressing, General,” Teng answered.

The two generals stared at each other for a moment. Then Po, of the anti-Mao party shrugged. “At least, this is only a matter for experts. I think we can leave it to Dr. Li.”

“We agree,” Madame Chu snapped.

With that the conference broke up. Illya followed Dr. Li out of the Spartan office, but his mind was busy. So far it all appeared normal. Dr. Li was the expert, the presence of the two generals seemed to indicate that the matter of the missiles was not open to debate. Yet, where was THRUSH's interest, and why were the Chinese so concerned with Soviet Missiles to be used in Hanoi?

Illya was puzzled, but he had little time to think as Dr. Li immediately entered his car and the guards had to enter their truck with the others. The two-car motorcade wound through the dark Peking streets. Illya now began to wonder what had become of the third car, the one with the four unidentified Europeans in it. He had a strong suspicion that the four had some connection with THRUSH.

Soon, Illya sensed that the car of Dr. Li was returning to the general area of the warehouse where the missiles had been. But they did not stop at the warehouse. Instead the car and truck drove on some two miles farther and pulled up at the edge of the railroad line.

The two flatcars sat on a siding, the missiles heavily covered and disguised. There were no lights on in the now dark night. The car of Dr. Li stopped, and the truck stopped behind it. The officer ordered all the soldiers off, and stationed them all around the perimeter of the area.

Suddenly two large flat-car trailer trucks appeared---each with a double trailer and the special cradles and slings Illya Kuryakin recognized at once were for transporting missiles!

Men appeared from nowhere, and a large crane began to move up the tracks toward the missiles. It was obvious that they were about to transfer the missiles from the railroad cars to the trucks!

Which could only mean one thing---the Soviet missiles, intended for Hanoi, were not going to Hanoi! The missiles were being diverted.

Why and where?

Was this the move THRUSH had been planning?

Yet the move could not be hidden; the Chinese must be aware of it, a part of it. They were stealing the Soviet missiles!

At that instant Illya felt the sudden heat in the breast pocket of his uniform jacket. A quick burning sensation.

He looked around. No one was watching him. A few feet away there was a small railroad storage shack. Illya moved to the shack and crouched behind it.

He reached into his breast pocket and brought out his pencil. The pencil clip was glowing red with its visual alarm. Illya pressed the clip and whispered into the pencil-radio.

“Bubba here. Come in Control. Bubba here. Over.”

A clipped female voice spoke quietly in the Peking night.

“Hong Kong Control to Bubba. Mayday. Your cover exposed. Repeat, mayday: your cover exposed. Implement alternative cover immediately! Acknowledge.”

“Bubba affirmative. Cover exposed, implementing alternative cover at once. Report Soviet Missiles being diverted from Hanoi destination and purpose unknown.”

“Roger, Bubba. Over and out.”

Illya Kuryakin stared for a moment at the small, silent pencil. How had his cover been blown? Only Waverly, Kalil Singh, and Solo knew. Solo? The small Russian shivered. If they had made Napoleon talk, what had happened to him?

Thinking of his friend, Illya was almost too late.

As he stepped out of the cover of the railroad shack, he saw an American-made jeep suddenly come tearing up the road toward the group around Dr. Li. A sixth sense told him that this was danger. The jeep skidded to a halt, and two men in civilian clothes ran up to the small Nationalist defector. Illya Kuryakin knew secret police when he saw them.

He turned on his heel and began to walk slowly off into the night. He did not run; that would have caught the eyes of the other guards instantly. He walked, and directly ahead, some fifty yards away, a factory complex began.

Illya studied it as he continued to walk slowly, calmly.

There were four buildings, mounds of slag, a great litter of steel shapes. It was a steel plant, a place easy to become lost in. All he had to do was reach it and---

“There! That one!”

The shout came in harsh, quick Manchu dialect.

“Halt!”

Illya continued to walk at a steady pace.

He did not turn his head or run or unsling his rifle.

“You! Soldier! Halt, I say!”

Illya began to slowly trot. Then at a count of *one, two, three*, he dove to his left, rolled, and came up running an erratic zig-zag pattern.

The first shots whined over his head as he had fallen.

The second volley whistled to his right as he zigged left.

He ran faster, then slower and dropped.

The third volley kicked dirt behind him, and whined over his head again.

He heard feet pounding closer behind him. He looked and saw that he had some fifteen yards still to go to reach the first cover of the steel plant.

He rolled onto his back, unslung his rifle, and fired four quick shots at the running guards. They went down, two hit. In the distance behind them Illya saw Dr. Li staring off toward him. Then he saw the four Europeans---they were running to the left to cut him off, and they no longer seemed like simple observers.

Illya fired another burst, then leaped up and dashed straight and fast for the first cover.

He sprawled behind a rustled steel shape just as the next volley slammed into the steel. He rolled, crawled, and then came up running again.

But now he had cover, and he ran fast from cover to cover in the dark

night. He could hear the shouted Chinese of the guards at various points behind him. And he heard the softer, more clever footsteps of the four anonymous Europeans off to the right.

He stopped and took stock. The night was dark, the factory silent. They would fan out eventually and cover the area. They would call for reinforcements. But that would take time. Illya smiled to himself.

In the cover of a grotesque rusted steel shape he began to strip. Moments later he stood in the night in complete black. They were coming closer, but they were not yet too close. Illya Kuryakin slipped out, all but invisible in the night now, and moved like a wraith into the nearest building.

Inside, he moved across the building until he reached the far side. He leaned against the steel wall and listened. He heard nothing.

Then he heard the step behind him.

“Ah, Mr. Kuryakin, I believe. I rather expected you would double back this way.”

The voice spoke in precise English. Illya turned to see the small figure of Dr. Li Po Shue smiling at him with a pistol in his hand. Or whoever was this man in the face of Dr. Li.

FOUR

Maxine Trent smiled down at Napoleon Solo. In the grey room the tape recorder still hummed as the tape reels slowly revolved. Maxine Trent gave an abrupt signal by a curt nod of her head.

“Enough for now. We can get all we want later. The information on Kuryakin must be transferred to Peking at once.”

“At once,” one of the three men said.

The man at the recorder stopped the machine and removed the reel. He handed it to the man who had spoken.

“Take the serum back to the lab,” Maxine ordered.

Solo sat silently on the metal chair and watched. He felt in perfect shape, not a single ill effect that he could tell. He looked at the reel of tape and realized that he had told a great deal. In his mind he fixed every impression he could remember of how he had felt to inform the laboratory when he returned---if he ever did.

He watched the two men leave through the section of wall that opened automatically. Maxine saw him watching them.

“You talked wonderfully, Napoleon,” the beautiful THRUSH leader said. “My! I never really knew that you knew so much. We’ll have some more sessions, of course. I think I’ll send you to the main stronghold. The Ultimate Computer will be very useful in getting everything out of you.”

“I’ll bet,” Solo said. “Of course, you know that none of it will be of any use to you.”

“Because they know you’ve talked? Oh no, Napoleon, poor dear. You’ll never escape the main stronghold, and you won’t be missed for a few days. I know how you operate.”

Solo smiled, but his eyes missed nothing as he watched for a chance, and his mind thought about the main stronghold. No U.N.C.L.E. agent had ever learned where the THRUSH secret main fortress was and lived to tell.

Maxine Trent laughed. “You and your information are going to be my appointment the council, Napoleon. Think of that. You’re going to help me get ahead.

“Very comforting,” Solo said.

Maxine grinned and was about to speak again, when a voice suddenly boomed into the room.

“Intruders entering the building! Already inside! Our outer alarm belt inoperative!”

Maxine Trent whirled and stared at a section of the wall. The beautiful woman’s face was contorted with sudden rage.

“Already in? How? Who is---“

“U.N.C.L.E. agents,” the voice boomed. “Waverly is with them, leader Trent. They have used some instrument to affect entry and render our outer detection inoperable!”

Maxine snarled at Solo. “How? How did they find us? You left no trail! We made sure!”

“We’ve got our little secrets too, Maxine,” Solo said with a grin, but the agent was tensed, ready.

The voice boomed. “There are too many!”

“Disengage,” Maxine ordered. “Use emergency plan X!”

The beautiful THRUSH leader turned to Solo. She nodded to the remaining man in the room. “Kill him.”

Without another word Maxine walked to the wall and went through. The remaining man drew his pistol and approached Solo. When the man was a few feet away, Solo lunged. The agonizing pain struck his legs and thighs, he fell to the floor.

But he did not fall alone.

He had timed his lunge so that the force of the shock from the chair threw him forward against the legs of the man with the gun. The two men went down in a heap. The gun slithered away across the metal floor.

Solo held on against the pain that surged through his body. His teeth ground and a low moan escaped his lips. But he forced his mind against the pain.

The man crawled and scrambled for his gun.

Solo moaned aloud to make the man think that he, Solo, could not move.

The man reached the pistol and grabbed for it. Napoleon Solo brought his clasped hands down full on the neck of the man.

The man dropped with one choked cry as his neck broke.

Solo sat on the floor, gasping against the pain.

Then, slowly, the pain ebbed and Solo looked around. No one else had come into the room. With Waverly’s attack, they had all run, leaving the observation room behind the grey walls un-manned.

Solo picked up the pistol and bent down to touch the metal chair by its legs. He touched carefully, but noticed that the bottom of each leg seemed to be insulated with wood. He picked up the metal torture-chair by its leg, and turned to study the grey wall.

He had noted the exact spot Maxine Trent had inadvertently looked at when she spoke to the unseen man in the observation room. He picked up the chair and hurled it against the wall at that spot.

There was a shattering of glass and the wall seemed to fall away, leaving a gaping hole that was actually a room.

Solo vaulted into the room, which was some three feet above the floor of the grey room. Pistol ready, he looked around. The small room, obviously a central communications room, was empty. The various instruments had been smashed. Solo crossed the room to the door and opened it.

He stood in a corridor with the same grey walls and no doors. This was, then, one of THRUSH's sub-stations. Solo listened. He heard doors breaking to his left and he heard faint footfalls to his right. He turned right and ran along the empty corridor.

Soon he heard the sound of water ahead: splashing and the lap-lap-lap of water against a dock. He ran on but more carefully. He rounded a turn in the corridor and saw them.

There were only five of them, and they were waiting anxiously for a small launch that was just coming to the dock. Solo looked for the two who had left with the tape. Maxine Trent saw him.

"It's Napoleon Solo! Get him!"

Solo fell flat to the floor, half covered by the wall of the corridor. He opened fire, the THRUSH pistol in both hands. Two of the THRUSH men went down at his first volley.

Their answering fire sang and buzzed along the metal walls of the corridor.

Solo caught Maxine in his sights. He squeezed the trigger. But an instant before the shot squeezed off, Maxine was gone. Solo blinked. The launch roared into high and heeled far over as it cleared the dock and sped out into the open water of Victoria Harbor.

Solo jumped up and ran to the end of the dock. Far out he saw the launch. Something was being dragged behind it. Solo looked, peered.

Maxine!

The resourceful woman was hanging onto a rope; even as Solo watched, the launch slowed, and Maxine was pulled aboard. Solo grinned. She had seen that he had her dead to rights, and had reacted instantly by dropping into the water and not taking the split second to jump for the launch as he was about to fire!

Solo looked down at the two men he had shot. They were the two who had been in the grey room with him---he had made sure he got them. He found the roll of tape in the pocket of the first one. As he straightened, he heard the matter-of-fact voice behind him.

“Well, Mr. Solo, I see you didn’t need our help.”

Solo grinned at Mr. Waverly. “I needed it. I’m afraid I told them a great deal. The sensor alerted you?”

“It did. But we’ve taken steps to invalidate anything you revealed,” Waverly said. “I see you recovered the tape. That will make it simpler. Our only problem is Mr. Kuryakin. I’m not sure we reached him in time.”

“You think they got him?” Solo asked.

“I don’t know. We reached him,” Waverly said, “but Communications reports he did not call in that he had assumed his second cover role.”

“He should have,” Solo said frowning.

“I know,” Waverly said grimly. “I fear, Mr. Solo, that you will have to immediately resume your trip. But a faster method will be needed now. Riskier, but we dare not wait.”

“The sooner the better.”

“Good,” Waverly said. “I suppose they have stripped this place, naturally. But you must now tell me about the drug they used.”

“And a chair. I liked the chair especially,” Solo said.

“Everything, Mr. Solo. Now, however, a car is waiting to take you to our special airstrip. Your full instructions will be given in the car. You can dictate your report in the car as you go.”

“Yes sir,” Solo said.

Two minutes later Napoleon Solo was in the car and speeding toward the airstrip.

FIVE

The converted U-2 aircraft droned through the dark night high above China. In the rear cockpit Solo peered below but he could barely see any lights on the ground. With his high-altitude suit and oxygen mask the cockpit was crowded, and Solo gave up trying to see the ground so

far below. He checked his weapons.

They were above radar, so high it was a hundred to one against the plane being spotted. The rest would be up to Solo. He rehearsed his cover story---a hasty one, but it would have to do.

He was a Soviet agricultural expert on a brief tour of duty in Hopeh Province. At the moment he was on a short vacation in Peking. He had the papers to prove it, and they would pass a cursory examination. Beyond that he would have to count on the fact that all Russians look alike to the Chinese, and that the present situation in Peking was confused. There had been no time to make a more solid and safe entry.

“Peking in two minutes. You ready, Solo?”

The voice of the pilot came over the intercom from the front cockpit of the high-altitude craft.

“I’m ready,” Solo said.

“I’ll signal as close as possible to the north suburb, but I’ve got to be sure you’re far enough out to miss the city. It wouldn’t do to float down right in the Forbidden City.”

“No, it wouldn’t do at all,” Solo said.

“After you eject, you have to free fall down to at least twenty-thousand. The lower you can get, the safer you’ll be. If you can hold out until five-thousand you should make it down just about unseen.”

“Right,” Solo said.

“Good,” the pilot said. “Ready now, and good luck.”

Solo checked all gear. He grasped the handles of the ejection seat. He concentrated and forced all considerations from his mind except the jump and free fall to come.

“Now!”

Solo pulled the ejection lever. His head snapped back and he felt the force press him against the seat. Then he was falling.

He began to count. He fell through the night attached to the seat and counted as the cold air rushed freezing around him. Then he began to see lights below.

The lights seemed to stand still for a long time.

Suddenly they were close---the many lights of the northern capital off to his left, the sparser lights directly below, and then no lights at all directly below.

The lights seemed to move away to the south, but actually it was only himself falling closer and closer to the ground and the open fields north of the city.

He could almost see trees below.

He pulled his ripcord.

The sudden jerk almost tore his shoulders off.

Then he was swinging in the air.

The ground that had seemed so close as he fell, was now much farther away. He estimated that he had pulled at about 4500 feet. That should make his detection very difficult.

He threw off his oxygen mask and loosened the straps of the ejection seat. He drew his U.N.C.L.E. Special and held the shrouds of the chute with his other hand.

Then the ground came up. Clear, an open field.

He hit, rolled, and was out of the seat. He collapsed the black chute and crouched, pistol ready for a count of sixty. Nothing happened. The only light he could see was a single light far off to the west. Nothing moved in the field. There was no sound in the night.

Solo got out of the chute. He picked up the chute and the ejection seat and dragged them to a thick grove of trees at the edge of the field. There he stripped off his flight suit, and buried everything in the center of the grove of trees. Then he brushed off his Moscow-made suit, checked his credentials, and began to walk off to the south and west where the road from the city should not be far.

When he reached the road he turned south. The lights of the city were some ten miles ahead. Solo walked and trotted in a steady pace along the road. He wanted to reach the city as soon as possible, but he could not risk stealing a car and attracting attention. It would also be too dangerous to try to hitchhike, even if a car came past. A Soviet expert should not have to solicit rides.

Then he passed a small cluster of dark buildings and had some luck. A bicycle leaned against a barn wall. He was on the bicycle and away in a matter of seconds. On the bicycle he made much better time and reached the city an hour or so later. He rode the bicycle until the houses and factories of the suburbs showed clearly that he was nearing the heart of the city itself.

He left the bicycle and resumed his walking. He reached the old Legation quarter and boldly entered a hotel known to cater to the Soviet experts, journalists and diplomats in Peking. He registered and his papers were examined. The Chinese clerk bowed to him, if a bit stiffly now that Sino-Soviet relations were not as cordial as they once had been.

He went up to his room, closed and locked the door, after listening for a time to be sure that he was not being watched. Then he checked the room for microphones. There were none.

Solo sat on the bed and touched his ring radio.

“Bubba, this is Sonny. Come in, Bubba.”

He spoke low into the tiny sending set. There was no answer. Illya Kuryakin would have his radio on visual and heat alarm only.

“Come in Bubba.”

There was no answer.

Solo pressed his ring again and stood up. He took off his left shoe, removed his heel, and brought out a small, flat box. The box contained a miniature dial and a tiny bulb. The bulb showed no response. Solo pressed a minute lever. Then he held the box flat and began to slowly circle the room. The dial of the tiny box swung and pointed in a steady southwesterly direction.

It was responding to the sensor implanted in Illya Kuryakin's brain. The sensor, the same that had saved Napoleon in Hong Kong, had not been activated by a drug, but the small electronic waves it sent out were being picked up by the small box.

The dial showed the direction of Illya Kuryakin.

Solo checked his pistol again, and went out of the room.

In the street he began to walk in the direction shown by the tiny dial. He hoped that he was in time---the brain sensor would work even if

Illya were already dead.

The dial in Solo's hand could be leading him to a grave.

ACT III

WHICH WAY DOES A THRUSH FLY?

The dank and dim stone room was far below the street level of the Chinese capital. Water dripped in slow, tortuous drops in a far corner. The stone floor was worn smooth by countless centuries of feet, for this was a room from the far past of the ancient civilization of Imperial China. It had echoed to the screams of uncounted prisoners, and had felt the cold eyes of a legion of inquisitors.

The eyes of the modern inquisitor who sat behind an incongruous grey metal desk in the ancient room were as cold as any in the long history of the silent stones. He was a small, slender man in the uniform of a full colonel of the Army of The People's Republic. His face was clean shaven and pale from years without sun.

The colonel toyed with a small riding whip, brushing it lightly back and forth across the metal surface of his desk. On the desk itself there was nothing but a slim file folder, open, a pistol, and an old-fashioned steel pen in a holder. The only light in the room was on a small table to the left of the desk.

Behind this table sat a short, fat man in civilian clothes. This man looked at nothing but the stenotype machine on the table in front of him. His fat fingers were poised over the keys, but his fingers did not yet move. He was waiting.

The other four people in the room also waited. Dr. Li Po Shue stood silently against the wall some distance from the cold-eyed colonel. General Po Soong Teh sat, as befitted his rank, on a small, upholstered chair behind the colonel. The other two were two of the Europeans who had been associated with Dr. Li since his arrival---two men Illya Kuryakin suspected of being agents of THRUSH.

Illya sat alone in the center of the room, bound hand and foot to a chair, the cold eyes of the colonel fixed on him. The small Russian watched the small riding whip in the hand of the colonel.

It was General Po who first broke the silence.

"I fail to understand what you are waiting for, Colonel Hsueh," General Po said.

“Dr. Li captured the man; his papers clearly indicate he is an American CIA agent. What else is there to learn?”

The small, slender colonel did not look around at the general. It was clear that while the general outranked him, the colonel was neither particularly intimidated nor friendly. In this room, rank or no rank, it was the colonel who commanded.

“I am not satisfied, General Po,” the colonel said quietly. “Perhaps he is a CIA man, and perhaps not. It is not usual for single CIA men to be operating in Peking in such a disguise. For what purpose, General? The Americans have many better ways to learn of the presence of Soviet missiles here. Such missiles are no secret, really. We have had many such weapons cross China for Viet Nam. Why should the Americans now make such an effort, take such a risk?”

“Who knows how the Americans think?” General Po said.

“I know, General,” the colonel snapped. “That is my job.”

Dr. Li spoke up. “It is not the missiles, Colonel; it is me they have been watching. I think it logical that they risk a great deal to watch me. I have even expected an attempt to take me back. He probably has accomplices.”

The colonel nodded slowly. “That is possible. That makes more sense. Still...” The colonel looked straight at Illya Kuryakin. “Was that your mission, spy?”

Illya shrewd eyes studied the faces and the room. The pattern had emerged some time ago. Dr. Li and the two Europeans knew who he was and what he was. He sensed that General Po knew also. Only the colonel and his one man did not know.

THRUSH had no desire to let the colonel know who Illya Kuryakin was. It was clear that the colonel was a member of the Chinese secret police, and was a supporter of Mao. Dr. Li and his friends did not want the presence of U.N.C.L.E. known. So they had planted false CIA identification on him, and were attempting to convince the colonel that he was a simple American agent.

The colonel was not convinced and was no fool. There was some kind of power struggle going on. Illya held the balance of power---he could tell who he was, or at least hold the matter open. All he had to do was reveal himself, and Dr. Li and his friends would be in deep trouble.

Except that Illya could not reveal himself. The situation in the room

was very clear. There were four men in the camp of Dr. Li, including General Po for some reason, and only two with the official secret police. Even if, and especially if, he were believed, all he would do was get himself and the colonel and his man instantly killed.

THRUSH did not want to be revealed here, even by implication. If they could pass Illya off as a CIA spy, well and good, but if not, they would have to kill the colonel, the man on the stenotype, and Illya. No, if Illya revealed who he really was, it would be instant death for everyone. His only chance was to play along and see what the colonel would do with a CIA man.

The colonel repeated his question. "Was Dr. Li your mission in Peking, spy?"

Illya Kuryakin shrugged in his best American-bravado style. "That's for me to know and you to find out, chum."

The colonel stared, swore. "The man is not even an American! Am I a fool? This man is English-trained! I detect a trace of native Russian. Who are you, spy?"

"Didn't Dr. Li tell you?" Illya said. "I guess you just never know who anyone is these days."

There was a faint movement in the room. Illya glanced and saw Dr. Li stand away from the wall, his hands in his pockets. The two Europeans were watching Illya. Behind the colonel, General Po shifted forward in his chair.

"The Americans recruit other nationals, Colonel," Dr. Li said, "Who knows that better than myself? They will fight to the last drop of Oriental blood! That is one of the reasons I became sure that the Formosan regime was bankrupt. Few Americans could be spies in China."

The colonel nodded slowly. His cold eyes stared hard at Illya. His hand continued to slowly swing his small whip.

"You are going to die, spy," the colonel said. "If you are an American spy, you will die. If you are not, there might be a difference in your sentence."

Illya Kuryakin shrugged, looked at the colonel. "I am what I am, Colonel."

"So?" the colonel said.

General Po swore. "I suggest you get it over, Colonel. We have better things to do!"

The colonel still did not look at the general. "Do not tell me how to do my work, General Po. A dead spy is of little use to anyone. It is good to know what the spy was doing. Don't you agree?"

"In most cases, of course," General Po snapped. "But in this case it is imperative that Dr. Li go forward with his work, and it is clear what the spy was doing. There was no other reason for this man to be where he was. He has done nothing but follow Dr. Li since his arrival."

The colonel seemed to think. Then he nodded.

"Yes, you are right," and he touched his whip to a small button.

The outer door opened and three guards came in. The colonel waved his whip at Illya Kuryakin.

"Take him out and shoot him."

The guards swiftly untied Illya and hauled him to his feet. Dr. Li watched, a small smile on his thin face. The colonel did not look at Illya Kuryakin again. The small Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent was hustled out of the room.

In the dank stone corridor outside the interrogation room, the guards pushed Illya before them to the left along the dark passageway. They seemed to go down at a sharp angle for some time. The passageway turned and re-turned on itself, until Illya felt that he was descending into the bowels of the Earth itself.

Then he was stopped, an iron door was opened, and the guards shoved him into a smaller, darker room than the interrogation room. Illya looked around. It was a grim, bare stone room with dark stains of blood all over the floor. In the center was a yawning pit of blackness. Beside the pit was a large steel drum of some chemical.

It was an execution room.

Illya turned to face the three guards.

One of them had a pistol in his hand now

Then Illya heard a noise behind him. He whirled.

The small, slender colonel stood there. The colonel had come out of a

hidden door in the walls. The colonel looked at Illya.

"Very well. Now tell me who you really are!"

TWO

Illya Kuryakin sat on a hard wooden chair that seemed to appear from nowhere. The colonel sat on another chair. The indolent manner was gone, but the small whip was still in the hand of the colonel.

"Let us be clear, whoever you are," the colonel said carefully. "I am not a fool. There was something going on in the interrogation room, something more than there seemed to be. And it is something *you* know, my friend. I have not been a policeman all my life to be fooled so easily."

Illya watched as the colonel took out a long Russian cigarette. The colonel lit it carefully, blew smoke.

"It was clear that Dr. Li, his two companions, and General Po were very nervous and alert," the colonel went on as he smoked. "It was also clear that you knew they were nervous, and I think you know why. The way you spoke it was clear that you were telling me something---something you could not come out and say because you knew that Dr. Li and General Po would not want me to know it."

Illya watched the colonel. It was plain that the man was no fool. In fact, it was clear that the colonel was very clever, perhaps too clever. If Illya told the truth, what would his fate be then? No, he had to be very careful. He sat and watched the small colonel, who blew intricate smoke rings.

The colonel smiled. "Not that I think that you care very much about my life, but you felt it better to play for time, to risk what I might do rather than what you knew they would do. You are, naturally aware of the difficulties between men like myself, who back Chairman Mao, and men like General Po, who are of different opinions.

The colonel rubbed his chin. "But I think the problem is more than that. You all but said that perhaps Dr. Li is *not* Dr. Li. The reaction of the good doctor, and the general, to that hint was most noticeable. So, now you will tell me what it is you know, and who you really work for."

Illya Kuryakin watched the thin secret police officer. He did not trust Colonel Hsueh for an instant. On the other hand, if he maintained

that he was only a CIA man, that there was nothing to tell, then he would certainly be killed about one minute after he convinced the colonel.

All he could do now was play for an opportunity---he was, after all, not bound now. The three guards had already been ordered from the room. They would be outside the door and alert, but that could be handled when the time came. Now he had to somehow make the colonel drop his guard for an instant.

“My name is Illya Kuryakin, and I work for an organization called The United Command for Law and Enforcement.”

The colonel flicked his whip. “So? An agent of U.N.C.L.E.? Is it possible?”

“You are aware of U.N.C.L.E., Colonel?”

The colonel shrugged. “I told you I have been a policeman all my life. Yes, I know of U.N.C.L.E. I know much about your work, although I am not at all sure whether I am in sympathy with that work or opposed to it. We are not too amused by international police organizations in China. Still, I have not heard that U.N.C.L.E. concerns itself with internal affairs of nations.”

“Unless those affairs pose a threat to world peace,” Illya said. “Or unless an agency such as THRUSH seems to becoming involved in those internal affairs.”

The Colonel frowned. “THRUSH? What is THRUSH?”

“An international organization dedicated to eventually controlling the world, Colonel, and for its own power. Their aim is power, total power, and all the profit that would mean.”

“And you think they are in China?”

“I have every reason to believe that Dr. Li is a member of THRUSH,” Illya said.

The colonel smoked and his cold eyes studied Illya Kuryakin with close speculation. There was doubt, and yet not complete doubt in the eyes of the small officer.

“You’re suggesting that Dr. LI is an impostor? I find that most difficult.”

“THRUSH is very clever, Colonel. The real Dr. Li is dead, we believe, and the THRUSH impostor has taken his place for a definite purpose--- a purpose that I don’t imagine is for the benefit of China.”

“But Dr. Li is well known! He is in the confidence of Chairman Mao himself,” the colonel snapped.

“I said that THRUSH was clever, Colonel,” Illya said, “and Dr. Li seems to be in the confidence of General Po, too.”

“You are suggesting that that THRUSH has some scheme of its own against China, and that it has convinced General Po and his faction, to collaborate?”

“Perhaps,” Illya said. “It is also possible, in fact most likely, that THRUSH is only using General Po and his faction. THRUSH is always and only for THRUSH.”

“You think this THRUSH has somehow convinced the anti-Mao faction in our government that it will aid them to get power away from the chairman?”

Illya nodded. “That’s the way I would guess it is working, yes. I think you better keep a close eye on General Po.”

There was silence in the small and dim execution room. The colonel bit his lip. Illya could see that Colonel Hsueh was in a quandary. The colonel wanted to believe that General Po and his faction were guilty of subversion, and yet he was afraid to believe that some unknown organization like THRUSH was actively dangerous to China. His police mind was against such a belief. He liked simple facts.

“What specifically, do you think this THRUSH is doing through Dr. Li, if he is an impostor?” the colonel said slowly.

“I don’t know yet,” Illya said evenly. “But my guess is that it has something to do with those Soviet missiles.”

“The missiles for Viet Nam?”

“I’m not at all sure that they’re going to Viet Nam, Colonel,” Illya said.

“So?” the colonel said. “You know much. Perhaps too much. How can I believe such a story? What can Dr. Li do even if he is an impostor? You don’t imagine that we will trust him in any sensitive position yet!”

Illya sat quietly. He gave no indication, but it was clear to him now that he was losing the colonel. Not that Hsueh would forget it all, no, he would investigate, but he would not need Illya. And he would not investigate closely enough, or fast enough, to stop THRUSH.

His bright, quick eyes watched for a sign of weakness. He saw that the colonel had relaxed. Only a fraction, but perhaps enough. Although he had been carefully searched and stripped of weapons, Illya still had a few emergency tools still hidden. Now what he had to do was somehow distract the colonel a fraction more.

"I don't think it matters, Colonel Hsueh," Illya snapped. "I think whatever Dr. Li plans he is already doing! I think THRUSH knew exactly how much Dr. Li could do. I think they are playing with you!"

The colonel jumped up. "You think we are fools?!"

"I think you are in serious danger, Colonel," Illya insisted. "I think you need my help, and you need it fast."

The colonel began to pace the room.

For one instant his back was to Illya Kuryakin.

The small agent moved with the speed of a cat. His right hand swept a button from his black trouser rear pocket. In the same motion he brought the button to his teeth and bit.

The colonel had turned, started to pace in the other direction, and had seen the movement of Illya. The colonel reacted instantly, his hand snaking to his pistol in its holster.

Illya threw the bitten button directly in front of the colonel.

The colonel's pistol was out.

A great cloud of white smoke burst from the button and instantly filled the small room.

Illya Kuryakin flung himself sideways, hit, rolled, and came up on his feet.

But the colonel did not fire.

Totally obscured by the cloud of smoke that enveloped him, the colonel saved his fire and jumped through the smoke. But there was smoke everywhere now, and the colonel stumbled in the blinding cloud.

Illya Kuryakin bent to pull the long scar from his right leg.

The motion could be seen, dimly, through the smoke.

The colonel jumped toward where he saw Illya's faint black shape, his pistol ready---and vanished into the gaping hole in the center of the room.

Screams sounded all the way down, echoed in the smoke-filled room for minutes.

Then there was a horrible thud far below and silence.

Illya wasted no time. The pit was deep and the colonel was gone. The small Russian whirled and jumped to the wall close to the door. The screams would have been heard.

Already the door was being opened.

Illya Kuryakin drew the long, thin, needle of especially strong metal from beneath the false scar on his leg.

The three guards piled into the room in a mob. They stopped, stumbled through the thick smoke. One shouted orders to his blinded men. Illya stepped out from behind the door and snaked his arm around the throat of the last guard, thrust with his deadly needle, and the man sagged dead in his arms without a sound.

Illya dropped the body and picked up the machine-gun the man had let fall.

One of the guards stumbled toward him through the smoke. Illya rose up and thrust his needle again. The six inch blade struck the guard just below the rib cage, angled up. The guard screamed once and collapsed.

The third guard fired.

The shots went wild.

Illya squeezed a burst at the flash of the guard's gun. The man fell over the edge of the pit.

Illya stood alone. But the shots would have been heard. Far off he heard voices already. He ran across the room, through the smoke that was now thinning, and looked for the secret door the colonel had come through.

He found it---a large stone that swung easily; some ancient entrance to the room. He opened the door and went through into a narrow passage of stone steps that mounted upward.

He closed the stone behind him, and began to climb with his eyes alert.

THREE

Napoleon Solo stood in the night outside the grim government building. His small sensing instrument showed that Illya Kuryakin was inside the building but below the level of the street. He observed the building closely. It was clearly some military or police headquarters.

Some men in uniform who went in and out wore uniforms, but not all of them. The small brass plaque at the door identified the building as Peking Command Headquarters. But Solo had an idea that the building covered more than that. It had a feel of secret police.

Solo took a deep breath, then walked up the steps and into the grim building. Eyes turned to look at him the instant he stepped into the bare, lighted lobby. Among the uniforms, and the Chinese faces, he stood out like a cat in a dog pound.

Two guards converged on him.

"My name is Vassily Kutusov," Solo snapped in Russian, and then repeated the phrase in Manchu. "Agricultural expert assigned to the Nanphu collective. My papers. I have an urgent message for your security commander."

The two guards hesitated, looked at the papers which, of course, were in Russian. Solo had caught them off balance with his aggressiveness, as he had hoped he would. He did not let them recover.

"I said the matter is urgent! Where is your commander?" he asked.

The two guards looked for help. An officer came across the lobby. Solo greeted him with a blast.

"Is there someone with authority here?" the agent snapped in Manchu dialect.

The officer took the papers, looked at Napoleon Solo. Then the officer motioned to a man behind a desk in a small office just off the main lobby of the building. The man trotted up, took the papers.

“Vassily Kutusov, Grade-1 Agricultural Advisor, Nanphu Collective,” the translator read from Solo’s papers. “It seems all in order, Comrade Lieutenant.”

The lieutenant nodded, looked at Solo. “You have some information? You will tell me.”

“I will not tell you!” Solo snapped. “I will tell your commandant! I suggest speed in this matter. It concerns the spy recently caught, who is probably even now under interrogation by your commandant!”

It was a risky shot, yet not too risky. Solo knew that Illya Kuryakin was somewhere in the building. It was logical that the commandant himself would be concerned with an unknown spy. And Solo was aware of the bureaucratic mind---bureaucrats were impressed by a man who seemed to have “inside” information. They tended to take one fact and make the assumption that a man knew the rest.

The lieutenant was impressed. If this arrogant Russian knew about the spy, then was he not most likely much more than he appeared to be? This was, clearly, out of the province of a simple lieutenant.

“Come,” the lieutenant said to Solo, assuming a commanding and conspiratorial manner to impress the soldiers.

Solo grinned to himself and followed the lieutenant along dim corridors and down stairs to a stone passage beneath the street level. The lieutenant ushered him into a large stone room, where the only furniture was a grey-metal desk and some straight chairs. One chair had an upholstered seat.

The lieutenant seemed to look around, a little puzzled.

“The colonel was here. I will find out what happened to him. You will wait here.”

“Not too long,” Solo snapped. “I suggest you find your colonel fast.”

The lieutenant nodded and left.

Solo looked around the large stone room. It was clearly an interrogation room. But Illya Kuryakin was not there.

Was he too late? They had forgotten to search him for weapons. They did not know just how they should treat a Soviet official. So they hesitated to do anything. Solo checked his U.N.C.L.E. Special, and went to the door to listen.

It was not likely that he could play the same game of intimidation with a colonel.

Far off, muted, and seemingly below him, he heard shots.

Solo frowned. Had they shot someone?

There were more shots, and then he heard the pounding of running feet--feet that faded as they went not toward the surface, but deeper below.

Solo looked around the room to see what cover there was in case he were trapped. He saw little cover. He opened the door and peered out into the corridor. It was a deserted corridor now, the sound of shouts from far below.

The small noise was in the far wall behind Solo.

The agent whirled and jumped for the cover of the metal desk. A section of the wall swung out like a door, and a man all in black stepped through. Solo raised his pistol. The figure carried a submachine gun.

Then Napoleon Solo saw the face of the small man.

"A dead pigeon," Solo said. "You should be more alert, Illya, old buddy."

At the sound of Solo's voice, Illya Kuryakin had dropped to one knee, gun ready. Now the Russian grinned.

"We're even it seems, Napoleon. Only I suggest we discuss all that somewhere else."

"An excellent suggestion," Solo said. "I think anywhere else would fill the bill."

"My thought exactly. What about that corridor?"

"Clear now, but probably not for long. Was all that noise below your doing?"

"I'm afraid so, and it won't stay below for long. Shall we?"

"After you, my dear Illya," Solo said, grinned.

The Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent moved soundlessly to the door of the room. Solo followed close behind.

At the door they both peered out. The corridor was still deserted, the sound of a minor riot far below.

"I got the colonel," Illya said. "At least, he got himself. They don't have a leader for the moment, and it's made them careless."

"A little luck is vital," Solo said.

"Make that a lot," Illya said. "Let's go."

The two agents moved at a steady trot along the deserted corridor. They angled upward and still encountered no one. Behind them the sound of angry voices had begun to grow louder. Sooner or later someone behind them would think to call ahead and block the exit to the building.

"We can't make it across the lobby," Solo said. "Too many guards and too much space."

"A suggestion?" Illya said.

"There are windows on the ground floor level, probably from smaller offices. They're barred, so our friends won't think about them---I hope!"

They reached the ground level. Ahead they heard shouts. The guards at the main entrance had been alerted at last. Illya pointed to a door to their right. Solo nodded.

The two agents opened the unlocked door, locked it behind them, and turned back to look at the empty office. A barred window was directly across the small room. Solo reached it in two strides. He dug into his clothes and came out with two tiny strips of foil. He wrapped a strip around two bars, pulled a small thread on each, and jumped back. The thermite glowed red and then white. The bars burned through and melted in seconds. The two agents ran to the bars, strained them, and bent back the sections above and below the melts.

Moments later they dropped to the dark street and ran off into the night of Peking. Behind them, inside the building itself, they heard the confused sounds of a frantic search.

FOUR

The two giant double-trailer trucks were parked in the early morning dawn light just off the highway between the roadway and the railroad tracks on the northern edge of Peking. The trucks of supplies and

soldiers were parked in a neat line behind and ahead of the two trailer trucks. The missiles rested on the flat trailers, covered by canvas.

Illya and Solo slipped among the slag heaps and steel shapes of the steel plant. They stopped at the last cover and looked across the open space to the trucks and soldiers gathered in the dawn. Illya nodded toward a small knot of figures near the lead truck.

"Dr. Li and his friends," Kuryakin said.

Solo stared. "And a friend of ours. Look, the third from the left."

Illya looked. The figure third from the left in the group with Dr. Li was a woman. A tall woman. She was dressed now in the uniform of an Albanian officer. But there was no mistaking who she was.

"Maxine Trent." Illya said. "Your friend gets around, Napoleon."

"At least we know that whatever THRUSH is up to, Maxine will be at the center of it," Solo said.

"The question is, what are they up to?" Illya said. "All we know is that they have killed Dr. Li and substituted an impostor, that Maxine Trent and some of her men are here, and that they are involved with some missiles intended for Viet Nam, but obviously being diverted."

"A lot depends on where the missiles are going," Solo said.

"Which means we've got to go with them."

"I'm afraid it does," Solo said. "But how?"

"Look," Illya whispered softly.

Far down the road a truck was driving slowly toward the convoy of trucks. Almost at the same time whistles blew all along the convoy, and men started to go into feverish activity checking their trucks, securing loads. The group around Dr. Li split up and all started for trucks at the head of the column. "They've been waiting for a laggard," Solo said.

"Look at the markings on the new truck---they're not the same!" Illya whispered.

"A replacement truck from a different unit!" Solo said. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"I'm ahead of you," Illya said.

The two agents slipped through the dawn among the buildings of the steel mill until they reached the road. The new truck was coming along slowly, its drivers clearly not sure if just what they were doing. They got no chance to find out.

Illya rose out of the grey dawn on the right, Solo on the left. The two agents moved swiftly. They signaled the truck to halt at a point where, for an instant, it was out of sight of the other trucks, part of the steel mill in between.

The truck halted, the drivers peering down, obviously unfamiliar with their assignment or the unit they were to work with. Illya jumped up on the running board and got the relief driver. Solo took the man behind the wheel. They stripped the bodies, quickly dressed in the uniforms of the drivers, hid the bodies in the back of the truck, and drove off.

The entire move had taken only a few minutes. As they drove slowly down the road, and around the steel mill toward the column, Illya studied the uniforms they wore and briefed Solo on what unit they were, what rank, what specialties, and what their names were from their papers.

"There are orders directed to Captain Chang, Transport Command," Illya completed.

"Who looks like he is just ahead!" Solo said.

The column was already on the road. It was moving south along the highway. The captain of the transport stood in the road with his hands on his hips. As Illya drove the truck up, the captain shouted: "Orders!"

Illya handed out his orders.

"Fall in line at the rear! What kept you?"

"We got lost!"

"The truck is in good condition?"

"Yes sir!"

"All right. Try not to get lost again!"

The captain trotted away and jumped into a truck as it moved past. Illya and Solo waited and fell in line as the last truck. The convoy wound through the city and out across the plain, heading south and

southwest.

At first Solo and Illya were alert each night the long convoy stopped. But they soon learned that their fellow drivers had no interest in them. For the most part the convoy stopped in open fields along the highway, where curious villagers came up to stare at them, and the drivers curled up to sleep beneath their vehicles. After a few desultory questions, easily answered by Illya, the other drivers paid them no special attention.

The convoy drove on, day after day, slowly beginning to turn west and then northwest. They passed over the Great Wall outside Lanchow and drove almost straight north. As the trucks passed through Yumen the two U.N.C.L.E. agents knew their destination.

"Sinkiang," Solo said. "The nuclear test center!"

"It looks that way," Illya said.

"What can they hit from Sinkiang?"

Illya Kuryakin thought carefully. "India! Calcutta or Delhi! They are both about fifteen hundred miles, Napoleon."

"That's great!" Solo said.

The two agents drove on, the great mountains of the Tibetan plateau towering to the south, the mountains of Mongolia to the north. Then, suddenly one late evening, the convoy left the road and turned straight north just beyond Hami. A wide, straight, modern highway cut straight ahead through the barren wasteland toward the Mongolian border.

Solo and Illya looked at each other. "Quite a road for this wasteland," Illya said.

"Exactly what I was thinking," Solo said. "It's a big installation of some kind, and new. This road has hardly been finished."

The convoy wound on for some time as darkness fell across the barren land. Then, ahead, set in a deep bowl surrounded by low mountains, Illya and Solo saw a complex of buildings. Solo studied the buildings as they swung slowly down the mountain road.

"Nuclear all right," Solo said, "and a new center. Look, two missile pads!"

“I see them,” Illya said. “But, Napoleon, this is a Chinese installation. THRUSH didn’t build this. The Chinese are bringing the missiles here. Then---“

“What is THRUSH doing?” Solo finished. “Why are they working under cover, even from the Chinese?”

“Obviously, the Chinese think they are doing one thing, and THRUSH is doing something else,” Illya said grimly. “Unless one faction of the Chinese knows what THRUSH is up to. Have you noticed, Napoleon, at all our stops, the Chinese officers with Dr. Li are all from the anti-Mao party?”

“I noticed. All General Po’s men,” Solo said.

The two agents had no more chance to talk. The convoy wound down into the bowl-shaped valley and pulled up in a large area between the two missile pads. In the night all the buildings and the two pads were brightly lighted by floodlights.

“They’re not hiding anything,” Solo said.

“Which means that whatever THRUSH has in mind is going to come as a big surprise. Somehow, Napoleon, Dr. Li is going to do something, and I don’t think it’s something to help the Chinese!”

After that all drivers were ordered to take their trucks to unloading depots. Illya and Solo drove to their assigned building. The nuclear base was swarming with workers in dark coveralls, and soldiers who paced a barb wire perimeter. But there were not many soldiers: the base was remote from any danger.

Their truck empty, Illya and Solo drove back to the motor pool area. In the deserted space, crammed with trucks, the two agents parked their vehicle and stepped out into the night. All the drivers and soldiers of the convoy were laughing and walking toward a lighted barrack building.

“I think we better find out what’s going on right now,” Illya said grimly.

“The main control building. I saw Dr. Li go in there with General Po and the rest,” Kuryakin said.

“Let’s go, then,” Solo said simply.

The two men began to glide silently through the night toward the

small, but brightly lighted, control center.

Five

In the main control room of the missile launching site, Dr. Li Po Shue, General Po, three other high-ranking Chinese Officers, Maxine Trent and her three THRUSH aides sat around a table. The conference had been going on for some hours, as Dr. Li explained his job.

“The missiles will be set up tonight, twenty-four hour work,” the thin impostor said. “I will set the controls and the guidance system. General Po will prepare the nuclear warheads for full operational installation in the morning. By noon tomorrow, gentlemen, the world will know that China has operational missiles aimed at India!”

General Po smiled like a wolf. “That should make them take notice of us! Those weaklings in India will be begging us!”

The general looked at Maxine Trent in her Albanian officer disguise. “Our Albanian friends will be glad they backed us. And they will tell our Soviet comrades!”

“We will tell them all, General Po,” Maxine said.

“Good! Then we had better go to work.”

The conference broke up, and everyone left the room but Dr. Li and one assistant.

The thin doctor worked carefully over the electronic instruments that would control the IRBMs. It was a slow and painstaking job. The doctor and his assistant worked in silence.

The doctor never looked up to a ventilation grid where bright eyes watched him work.

Behind the grid, flat in the ventilation duct, Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo lay in silence. They had been in the small space for some hours now, after entering the building with the help of their hidden devices.

They watched the false Dr. Li Po Shue operate the system controls, then turn his attention to a thick set of blue-prints and specifications. The small impostor and his assistant worked on these for some hours. At last the doctor straightened up.

“That should do it. One missile will be prepared for target Calcutta,

and one for target Delhi. That should make the world take us a little more seriously.”

“And six years ahead of schedule!” the assistant said.

Dr. Li chuckled. “Thanks to our generous Soviet comrades, eh? Fools! To send IRBMs through China. Your General Po outwitted them nicely when he talked them into sending the missiles to Viet Nam. This should give your anti-Mao faction a big gain.”

“And help, in the end, to insure world peace,” the assistant said. “With a nuclear delivery punch, they must talk to us. We can make honest overtures for an understanding, and the people will back us once they know that we are strong. Mao’s war pose will have to fall.”

“Of course,” Dr. Li said. “Well. I think we can go and see how General Po is progressing. You should go ahead. I have one minor test to make.”

The assistant bowed and left.

Dr. Li stood there for a moment; then he stepped softly to the door. He peered out, was satisfied, and closed the door. Then he returned to the sheaf of blue-prints and specifications he and the assistant had just finished working on. The doctor began to work very fast, making notes, correcting the charts.

In the ventilation duct, Illya and Solo looked at each other as they watched.

Another half hour passed, and the small scientist stood with a smile. He turned toward the door. There was a light knock on the door. The doctor opened the door. Maxine Trent came into the room.

“Is it done?”

“Done,” Dr. Li said.

“Good. Then we must rejoin General Po before he becomes at all suspicious,” Maxine said.

Maxine Trent and the false Dr. Li left.

There was a moment of silence in the dark control room.

Then metal grated, and Illya and Solo dropped down to the floor of the room. Solo drew his pistol and stood guard at the door; Illya sat back in the chair and stared at the charts before him. He touched the

missile load and power specifications. Then he turned. Solo watched him.

“Find it?”

Illya, Kuryakin nodded. “I found it, Napoleon.”

“Well?” Solo said.

“Dr Li has changed the rocket attitude, the entire operational data. The missiles, when they are erected on the pad and programmed to these control and guidance specs, will not be aimed for Delhi or Calcutta.”

“Where will they be aimed?”

Illya Kuryakin was silent a moment. He looked up at a large world map on the wall of the control center.

“One will be aimed at Peking! The other at a place in the Ural Mountains---the exact spot of the Soviet Missile Testing Station!”

“You mean,” Solo said slowly, “if those missiles are fired, nuclear bombs will hit Peking and Russia at the same time?”

“I’m afraid that’s exactly what I mean.” Illya said. “And I doubt that Russia, or Peking, will stop to ask questions. Each will assume that the other fired!”

ACT IV

SONS OF GENGHIS KHAN, ARISE

Illya and Solo moved through the dark night of Sinkiang, cold at the high altitude, toward a rocky hill just east of the base below them now in the bowl-shaped valley. They had escaped from the control building, and the center itself, without trouble, and without being seen.

No one had challenged them, and they had crossed from the valley up into the hills. Now they reached the crest of the hill, and Solo crouched down and pressed the button on his radio ring.

“Napoleon Solo calling Lhasa relay. Agent Solo requests direct relay to Hong Kong Control Central. Over.”

There was a silence, and then, “Lhasa relay: stand by, Agent Solo.”

Another silence, and the calm voice of Alexander Waverly. "Ah, Mr. Solo, you have been silent a long time. Is Mr. Kuryakin with you?"

"Yes sir, and we don't have much time. They can trace a relay call," Solo said quietly.

"Quite true. You have uncovered the THRUSH plan?"

"Yes sir," Solo said, and explained what Illya Kuryakin had discovered.

Waverly did not speak until the report was finished. Then there was a moment of silence.

Waverly's voice was grim. "I see. The Soviet will blame the Chinese. Mao's faction will probably blame Russia. The anti-Mao faction could blame both Russia and Mao. Also, Dr. Li will undoubtedly be labeled a tool of the Americans. No matter what is learned, the situation would be terribly dangerous. It could lead to a very tense situation in the world, a threat of World War III, and chaos inside China at the same time."

"A perfect chance for THRUSH to probably gain control of China!" Solo said.

"At least," Waverly's voice said from far off Hong Kong. "If it did not lead to a world war, with THRUSH hoping to emerge as the ruler of the world, it would probably leave them in control of China. We cannot permit either to happen, Mr. Solo. We cannot even permit Russia to attack China and create a situation in which THRUSH could take over a weakened China!"

"No sir," Solo said.

Behind him, on the actual crest of the dark Sinkiang hill, Illya Kuryakin watched the barren countryside.

"They must be stopped, Mr. Solo," Waverly said at last. "You and Mr. Kuryakin must stop them. China and Russia must remain as they are. We must gain at least a year of time in which to bring the world to its senses!"

"Yes sir," Solo said. "They'll be stopped."

"Reveal yourselves to General Po if you must. But you must do everything to aid the Chinese in this matter. Every year counts, Mr. Solo."

“Yes sir,” Solo said.

The radio went silent. Solo looked at the ring for a moment, then pressed the button to close communications. He stood.

“Napoleon!” Illya whispered.

Solo turned, his pistol in his hand.

Illya Kuryakin pointed down the hill.

Less than a hundred yards down the hill men were climbing.

There were not many, about six, but they came up steadily and carefully. Illya and Solo watched. Then they slipped away to the other side of the hill and started picking their way down through the rocks.

A beam of light caught them like insects on a pin.

Illya dove for a boulder directly in front of him.

Solo flung himself sideways and crashed into a rock, rolled, and lay bruised behind it. A volley of machine-gun fire split the darkness. It came from below on this side of the hill. Then another beam stabbed from behind them.

They were caught in a crossfire.

“You take up, I’ll take down!” Illya called.

“Right,” Solo answered.

Both agents steadied their weapons and prepared to fight. They heard their enemies creeping closer in the dark. Solo fumbled in his clothes and brought out a long, slender tube. He attached it to his pistol, and inserted a special bullet in the chamber. Then he held it straight up and fired.

Instantly he removed the tube, ejected the special shell, and was ready to fire.

As a glaring light burst in the air over the hill.

A light as bright as day for a long minute.

The men above and below them were caught full in the light of the special flare.

Illya Kuryakin opened fire. Their enemies dove for cover, tried to run,

scrambled across the face of the bare hill. Two went down and did not move.

Then the light of the flare faded. "They'll rush us now," Illya whispered through the dark.

"They will," Solo said.

The two agents lay and waited. They waited a minute, their eyes straining to see in the dark that was deeper now that the flare had faded. They waited at least two minutes.

Almost three minutes passed.

"Try another flare," Illya whispered. "Where are they?"

Solo prepared his pistol and fired another flare. He waited. The light burst high up and illuminated the entire hill.

"Look!" Illya cried.

They were all over the hill in the glare of the flare. Small men on horses, with shaggy hats and bandoliers of bullets, and bright clothes of cloth and leather.

Just as the light began to fade, a small, heavy-set man seemed to appear out of the ground itself and stand on a rock over Illya and Solo.

The man had a long, flowing mustache and carried a small curved sword. His piercing eyes looked down at them. Then he waved his arms in a wide circle.

All around Illya and Solo men seemed to appear---fifty men, all armed, all watching the two agents.

The man spoke one word. In Chinese.

"Come!"

Up the hill in the last light of the flare the two agents saw that the men who had attacked them first were standing with their hands behind their heads---captured.

One of the men with his hands up was Dr. Li Po Shue.

"Come!" the short, stocky leader of the strange men said once more.

All around the slope of the hill the small, shaggy men on their shaggy horses herded their captives downward and toward the north.

TWO

In the stifling hut the prisoners sat facing each other. Illya and Solo sat against one wall, their hands tied behind them, and grinned across the dirt floor at the five men led by the false Dr. Li who sat in the exact same condition against the other wall.

“Dr. Li, I presume?” Solo said. “Or *not* Dr. Li, I presume?”

The false Dr. Li shrugged. “What does it matter, Mr. Solo? There has been an error; these nomads will free us as soon as they contact the Chinese authorities. Then you will be dealt with.”

“Are you running this show, Dr. Li, or does Maxine Trent outrank you?” Solo said.

Li smiled. “Let us say we are equals. If you are looking for my THRUSH rank, don’t bother. You won’t have time to care.”

Suddenly, in the thick air of the hut, Illya began to chuckle. They all looked at the Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent, even Solo. The cold eyes of the fake Dr. Li narrowed.

“Something amuses you, Kuryakin?” Li snapped. “I assure you that what these savages will do to you will not amuse you.”

Illya looked around the hut, which was built of heavy skins hung over a frame of wicker-like bent boughs. Thick furs hung on all the walls of the hut.

“I’m not sure that it will amuse you either, Dr. Li, or whoever you are,” Illya said. “These savages as you call them are Mongols. From the look of their clothes and horses, I’d say they are from the Chuguchah area, and are Mongol mixed with Kazakh. That leader was wearing a Hetman’s shoulder knot.”

“Is that supposed to mean something?” Dr. Li snapped.

Illya nodded slowly. “I see that you aren’t a real expert on China, or Russia, whoever you are. I think the real Dr. Li would have known what it means, my friend.”

“Perhaps you can enlighten me then,” Dr. Li sneered.

"I can," Illya Kuryakin said. "It means that these men are bitter foes of both China *and* Russia! They are known to hate the Russians and the government in Ulan Bator, which favors Russia, and they also hate the Chinese and the government in Peking. They are free nomads who believe they owe allegiance to no one, belong to no one, and admit no borders of any kind. They don't even accept the Mongolian government."

There was a thick silence in the hut. The odor of heavy animal skins was overpowering. But the odor of worry was even stronger. The THRUSH men all looked at each other. Dr. Li rubbed his thin face. There was sweat on his brow now.

"Which means?" Dr. Li said in a tight voice.

Illya Kuryakin shrugged. "That they will not contact the Chinese authorities, or any other authorities, and if they do, it won't be to ask advice. No, I think we are all in the same boat, and the closer they think we are to the Chinese government, the worse it will be for us. The only thing worse, probably, would be close to the Soviet government.

Dr. Li was about to make some angry reply, when the skins at the entrance of the hut were thrown violently back and three small, wiry, thin bearded men came in. Each carried an old-fashioned pistol from the vintage of the First World War, but the pistols were well-oiled and well-tended.

Each of the men also carried a long length of leather thong with loops in it. The three men were laughing and talking in some strange language. They laughed, but their eyes were the coldest black Napoleon had ever seen.

Without speaking to the prisoners, each of the men looped the thongs over the heads of the prisoners and tightened them around the necks. One of the men fastened his thong around Dr. Li and two other THRUSH men, the other two Mongols took Solo and Illya on one lead, the last two THRUSH prisoners on the other.

Then the prisoners were dragged out by the thongs around their necks.

They were pulled roughly across an open space among huts. The ground had been stamped down by years of many feet. The village itself was in a valley among mountains, set close to a high cliff so that it was almost invisible from the air or any direction. Illya looked

around closely, his sharp eyes studying the mountains.

They were all dragged to the edge of the village where hundreds of the Mongol warriors sat their small horses, or stood in surly groups leaning on spears and rifles.

The small, stocky leader sat on a strange throne-like chair covered with furs. The chair was made from the bones of animals, and the decorations were the skulls of men!

The leader stared at them a moment, then motioned.

The prisoners were all pushed to the ground, made to sit before the throne, the thongs still around their necks.

“So,” the leader said in Chinese. “Who are you, and why do you fight each other?”

Dr. Li tried to rise, was pulled back by the neck, and sputtered angrily. “I am Dr. Li Po Shue of the Government of The People’s Republic of China! I demand that you release me and my men, and execute these enemies of China!”

The leader looked at Li. “So? These men are the enemies of China? How are they enemies of China? How are they your enemies, Chinese man?”

“We have a big base, great rockets.” LI explained in childish Chinese. “We protect China and you from outside enemies. These men wish to destroy great rockets, destroy People’s Republic.”

Illya Kuryakin began to laugh. The Mongol leader, and the others, all looked at the U.N.C.L.E. agent. Illya nodded toward the mountains all around.

“Unless I’m wrong, and I’m not, we’re not in China, we’re across the border in Mongolia. I don’t think the leader cares much about China, Dr. Li.”

The stocky leader turned his cold eyes toward Illya. “How do you know we are across the border?”

“Because as a young man I have lived near here,” Illya said.

“Then you are a Russian!” the leader said.

“Yes,” Illya said, “I am a Russian, but I am not working for the Soviets. I am working for an international organization that wishes the

peace of the world. This man lies to you. He is here to send the rockets against Russia and China, to start a big war!"

The leader stared. "You are Russian, but not Russian. This man is Chinese, but not Chinese? You speak of a big war, Russia and China, that is not bad. Russia. China, what do we care? Let them kill each other."

"But the war will come to you, here," Illya said. "There will be many soldiers, much death---here."

The Mongol leader stared at Illya Kuryakin, then looked slowly at Dr. Li again.

"He lies," Li said. "He is a Russian; he has said so. Are Russians your friends?"

The THRUSH impostor learned fast. The Mongol leader seemed to nod at his charge. He let his black eyes turn from one group to the other.

"We do not care. China or Russia, all the same. We do not care about either, we are ourselves. We are the sons of the great Genghis Khan! We do not want a big war to come to our land. The small man is Russian, our enemy. The other man is Chinese, our enemy. The big men are strangers to our land, we do not know about them. All are nothing, should die, end it."

The Mongol leader studied all the faces of the prisoners. He seemed to be thinking hard. Then he motioned, and five men went to him. These were clearly sub-leaders. The six conferred for a time. In the cold mountain morning, the sun had just reached the top of the valley rim opposite the village. At last, the conference ended.

The leader stood from his macabre seat. "One of you lies. Perhaps both lie. But we do not want a big war to come here. If small Russian tells the truth, then a big war will come here, and that is not good. He says he will stop big war."

The leader turned to Dr. Li. "Chinese man says his big rockets will protect us from big war tomorrow. If he tells truth, then it is good for us, too. How do we know which one tells truth? We do not. So, we will learn who tells the truth. The Gods will tell us who speaks true."

The leader made a sweeping motion. There was a murmur among the horde of Mongol warriors. The five sub-leaders leaped onto their horses and galloped off toward the far end of the village.

Solo watched them. "What does he mean, the Gods will tell, Illya?"

Dr. Li snarled. "Some sort of stupid magic, no doubt! These savages!"

"No," Illya said, his eyes watching the horde of Mongols as they talked excitedly. "Look at them! They're laying bets!"

"Bets?" Dr. Li said, staring. "On what, Kuryakin?"

"On us, Dr. Li," Illya said drily. "You see, it will be a trial by combat!"

THREE

The Mongol warriors formed a giant circle far out on the open floor of the mountain valley. One of the sub-leaders rode just inside the circle, four lances in his hand. He struck each lance into the ground as he galloped until the lances formed the four corners of a large rectangle three times the size of a football field.

"Come!" the leader commanded.

The grinning and excited guards pushed Illya Kuryakin and Dr. Li forward toward where the Mongol leader stood with two snorting ponies. There was a great shout from all the wild horsemen of the Mongol Plain as Illya and Li stepped to the leader. They were excited, the Mongols.

Illya and Li stood before the chief.

"You will each take a horse, start at each end of the field. You will have a whip, a knife, and your hands. The man who wins the Gods say tells the truth. The man who loses tells lies. To win you must do one of three results: You must be the man who remains on the field---a man who rides from the field bounded by the lances, or is forced from the field, loses. The man who falls from his horse loses. The man who is killed loses."

Solo, some fifty feet away, listened. He looked around, but there was no way out. The fierce Mongol warriors ringed the field in a solid wall. Solo heard the instructions: a man lost the contest if he was killed, fell from his horse, or left the field of combat for any reason. It was, in short, really a contest of horsemanship! The question was, how good was Illya on a wild Mongolian pony? And how good was Dr. Li---the false Dr. Li?

But there was no more time to wonder. With a great shout from the eager Mongols all around the field, Illya and Dr. Li mounted their

ponies, with only furs for a saddle, and rode to opposite ends of the field. Solo and the THRUSH men watched tensely. There was a smile on the faces of two of the THRUSH men---perhaps Li was an expert horseman after all!

At the far end of the field, Li stripped off his coat, grasped the whip in his right hand, put the knife in his teeth, and gripped the bridle of the pony in his left hand. Illya sat his pony, his whip in his left hand, the knife in his belt.

“Now!” the leader cried.

The two men kicked their ponies and rode at each other.

Dr. Li rode straight at Illya, the whip lashing out. Illya evaded the whip, jumped his horse out of the path, and Li hurtled past almost to the edge of the field.

Li reigned expertly, the pony went up on its hind legs, and Li brought it around without the forelegs touching the ground or leaving the field.

Illya swooped into Li before the impostor could set his pony again. Li’s whip lashed out, cutting into Illya’s face. But Illya’s pony struck Li’s pony and the THRUSH man swayed in the saddle. Then the two horses whirled apart. Li galloped up the field, recovered. Illya wiped the blood from his face. The Mongols shouted.

The battle of skill went on in the sun on the arid plain below the mountains. The ponies circled, ran at each other, hurtled around the field. Twice Illya was almost forced off the field by the horsemanship of Li.

Once a cut of Illya’s whip nearly unseated Li.

Then Illya caught Li’s whip and pulled it away from the THRUSH man. Li had to let it go or be pulled from his pony.

Minutes later, in a hand to hand struggle on their horses, Illya lost his whip. Li struck with his knife. Illya evaded, and nearly rode Li off the field.

The contest went on up and down the field in the valley.

Solo watched the Mongol leader. The leader was studying the battle intently.

Then, suddenly, Li had Illya backed to the edge of the field, slipping half off his pony, unable to control the pony. All Li had to do was ride hard and Illya would be beaten. The two horses were side to side. Illya was helpless.

But Li did not push Illya off the field. Instead, the THRUSH agent raised his knife and slashed a killing blow at the helpless U.N.C.L.E. agent.

The blow only grazed Illya, and in that instant his pony slipped out of the trap and Illya regained control and rode off still on the field.

But Illya had lost his knife. Now the contest took a different turn. Li, his face split in a vicious grin, ceased to try to force Illya off the field, or unseat him. Instead he made attack after attack with his knife.

Li wanted to kill Illya.

Instead of forcing the U.N.C.L.E. agent toward the edges of the field, he inexorably attacked in the center, all his efforts on a kill, his eyes blazing with hatred and triumph as he stalked his unarmed victim.

All around the field the Mongols began to mutter. The contest was going on longer than they would have allowed. With the knife, Li had all the advantage in forcing Illya from the field.

The Mongols muttered, "The horse! The horse!"

Solo realized that what they would have done was kill or cripple the horse of the unarmed Illya and so make him fall and the contest would be over.

But Li continued to attack Illya.

Until, suddenly, Kuryakin broke away and rode fast in a straight line, leaned down below his horse at full speed, and retrieved his knife!

Reigning in, he turned to face the infuriated Li.

Li rode at full tilt. The horses collided. Li slashed at Illya. The U.N.C.L.E. agent grasped his opponent, and suddenly both fell to the ground.

The ponies galloped off. The Mongols raised a wild shout. The leader stood and raised his arm. It was a signal that the contest was over.

"Stop!" the leader commanded.

Men rushed out and separated the contestants. Illya stood away, his knife at his side.

Li broke from the Mongols that held him and ran at Illya, his knife raised, aimed at Illya's heart.

"Stop him!" the leader commanded.

The Mongols swarmed over Li and held him.

The Mongol leader approached both men. He looked from one to the other.

"The contest is over. You have both lost!"

"Or won," Illya Kuryakin said quietly. "No," the leader said, "you have both lost. That is our way. You have the right to say what will be done with each other. Chinese?"

"Kill him!" Dr. Li said, panting.

The leader watched Dr. Li. "You know that if you say kill, he will say kill. You will both die! You know that Chinese man?"

"Yes. I say you must kill him. He would destroy China!"

The leader turned to Illya. "And you, Russian?"

"Hold him here until I can show you that I speak the truth. I will return to the Chinese base, and tell them what I know he has done, and when they tell you he is a liar, that he will start a big war, then you will know who is right."

"You wish us to return with you? Hear what you say, and what the other Chinese say? You do not wish him killed?"

"His death is not important. What he has done is," Illya said. "He wishes me dead to hide the truth, even if he must die himself."

The leader was silent. The Mongols waited. Then the leader motioned. He pointed to Dr. Li.

"Kill him! Kill all his party!"

Dr. Li paled. "No! You fool, no! Can't you see, you stupid ape, that this man is lying, I am your friend! I---"

The leader stared at Li.

You are an expert horseman. Why did you not win? Why did you try to kill this man and not just win? Why did you not kill his horse? You could have won, but you wanted to kill him”

“I---“ Li began, and the sudden fear in his eyes showed that he had realized his mistake.

The leader spoke again. Only now, suddenly, the stocky Mongol Chief spoke in English!

“Do you think because I wear skins I am a fool? Do you think I believe in trial by combat and the Gods?” the chief laughed. “I have studied in Moscow and Peking. I have been to London! I speak ten languages. My people are a simple people, but to lead them I knew I must be with the times. To keep our simple life, I had to learn the ways of the modern world.

You wanted this man dead because you feared he might make me believe him, that something might happen that would make me believe him. So then he is telling the truth. If he were a liar, you would not fear his words, as he does not fear your words!”

The leader laughed, spoke again in English, his people watching him but not understanding what he said. “My people believe the old ways and the old Gods. Good. They do not know that I do not believe. But it is very clear that you, Dr. Li, are the liar. You are willing to die as long as this man and his companion die too! The only reason you would have for that is that he is telling me the truth, and your plan is ready, and others can carry it on for you!

“You fear what these men tell me. You want them dead at any price. They do not want you dead, they want your plan stopped. Therefore, they are telling me the truth!”

There was silence as the chief stopped speaking. Then the chief motioned again and spoke in his own language.

“This man is the liar. He could have won, but he wanted the words of his opponent stopped. Therefore, it is his opponent who told us the truth. Is that not so?”

The Mongols all nodded.

“Take them and kill them all!” the chief commanded.

Still struggling, Li and the others were dragged away. The chief turned to Illya and Solo.

“We will go with you. Tell us how to stop the plans of that man!”

“Do you have to kill them?” Illya said.

The chief looked at Illya. “It is our way. Are they not murderers? Would they not die in your country?”

“Yes, they would, but---“ Solo said.

“A trial? Yes, but in our law they have had their trial. They have convicted themselves. Now come. We will help you. We, too, do not want a war. We want peace. Peace to live our lives in our own way. Can you stop these men?”

“With your help,” Illya said.

“Then we go now,” the leader said.

The stocky Mongol turned on his heel and walked away. His sub-leaders followed him. Already his Mongol warriors were preparing for battle.

FOUR

Illya and Solo lay on the rim of the bowl-shaped valley above the Chinese missile site and looked down in the afternoon sun. Illya pointed.

“There, those silver objects---they are the nuclear warheads,” Illya Kuryakin said to the chief.

“They are not yet on the missiles,” the chief said in English. The chief has told them to speak only English. He did not want his people to know how much he knew of the strange modern world they hated.

“One is,” Solo said, and pointed.

The two U.N.C.L.E. agents looked at each other. Were they too late? One of the rockets was ready, programmed by Dr. Li to fall on Russia or Peking!

“If we try a straight attack,” the Mongol chief said, “will they not fire it before we can stop them?”

“They will,” Solo said, and looked at Illya. “Maxine Trent is down there. She’ll fire it if we attack.”

“Then we can’t attack until we can stop her, Napoleon,” Illya said.

"We'll have to get down there."

"With all those men?" Solo said.

All around the giant missile men worked and soldiers paced on the alert. "Maxine knows that something's happened to Li," Solo said. "She'll be ready."

"We'll have to risk it, Napoleon. I must get into the control room and sabotage the launch mechanism," Illya said.

The Mongol chief spoke. "We will not attack, but we will appear. We will ride down and threaten the base from the south. They have many men. We will lose the element of surprise, but the risk must be taken. When we ride down and appear, it will divert them, and you can slip in.

"You will do what you have to, and then we will await your signal to attack. When we attack, they will fire their missile. It will fail, and the threat will end."

Illya and Solo glanced at each other. "Many of your people will die, Chief," Solo said.

"We are not afraid to die. We are only one band; our people are many. A great war will harm all. We do what must be done."

Without another word the stocky Mongol leader turned and walked away toward where his men waited on their fiery ponies below the mountain.

Illya and Solo began to work their way carefully downward among the rocks. When they reached the bottom, they moved to the edge of the open space on the floor of the valley and waited. Illya pointed to the weak place in the barbed wire fence they had cut when they escaped earlier, and had pieced back together so that it had not been found.

"When we see the way clear, we go through there," Illya said. "We work around to the left behind the buildings and vehicles. At the control room, I'll get inside; you watch outside. Once I'm in we won't hide any more. I won't need more than a few seconds."

"Right," Solo said. "Will we have time to get out?"

"I hope so, Napoleon."

Solo stared across the open space. "Yes, I hope so."

Then they saw the workers and soldiers on the base suddenly begin to run toward the south. The Mongol warriors were defiling from the mountains out onto the valley floor. They brandished their weapons, and formed a great mass on their wild ponies.

On the nuclear base everyone was shouting now. The workers and soldiers grabbed their weapons and ran toward the southern perimeter.

“Now,” Illya called out.

The two agents sprinted out across the open space. They were at the fence in seconds, and through the fence. Inside they ran left and around among the buildings and masses of vehicles readying the missile pads. They reached the control room unseen. Solo crouched, his pistol ready. Illya slipped inside the building.

Napoleon Solo waited in the shadow of the control building.

There was firing to the south---the Chinese were firing. Solo heard nothing from the Mongols. He could imagine the small warriors just sitting their horses, while the Chinese could not figure what was happening.

Inside the control building he heard sudden shots. Solo waited. There were no more shots inside the control building. Two men appeared around the corner of the building. They were Chinese security men. They saw Solo too late. The agent cut them both down with two shots from his pistol.

He waited.

The firing had increased at the south perimeter. But still the Mongols did not return the fire.

Then Solo saw her---Maxine Trent.

Still in her Albanian uniform, the beautiful THRUSH leader came running across the open ground toward the control building. She was not alone. Four other Europeans in civilian clothes were with her---THRUSH men.

Solo readied to fire---and Maxine saw him in the same moment. She opened her mouth, shouted, and dove to the ground.

Solo fired. Two of the THRUSH men were too slow in going down. Now they went down and would not get up. Maxine crawled behind a

crate, her pistol out.

Illya Kuryakin came running from the control building. He had blood on his arm.

“Let’s get out of here!” Illya Kuryakin shouted, and dashed off to the nearest building.

Solo needed no second invitation. The two agents raced back by the same route in the cover of buildings and trucks. Maxine and her men ran after them. Other soldiers appeared now, joined Maxine in pursuit.

Then Solo looked back as they reached the fence. Maxine has stopped. Solo saw her stare toward himself and Illya, and then back at the control room.

Solo had no more time to look. He dove through the fence behind Illya. Barbed wire ripped his arm. Bullets kicked dirt all around them. The air was alive with wasp-like sounds as the pursuers fired at them

Then they were in the rocks and climbing. Behind them the soldiers and THRUSH men were still following. They reached the crest of the hill.

Illya took out a tiny grenade and threw it. The explosion rocked their pursuers. It was also the signal to the Mongols.

There was a great shout to the south, and instantly the firing increased and rolled across the valley in a massive attack.

The soldiers pursuing Illya and Solo turned and ran back down to their threatened base.

Illya and Solo stopped and looked back down the hill to the base.

They had a clear view.

The battle to the south rose in intensity. The Mongols were taking heavy punishment in their direct assault, but they were pushing into the base through sure force of numbers.

It would only be moments before they came within range of the tall missiles on their pads.

“There!” Solo cried.

Far blow a man was running between the missile pads and the control room building.

“General Po,” Illya Kuryakin cried.

“Is he going to fire the missile?” Solo said, surprised.

“He’s going to fire!” Illya said.

“Then he has to be in with THRUSH all the way,” Solo said. “The whole anti-Mao group must be!”

The general vanished into the control building.

Illya Kuryakin threw a second tiny grenade. It exploded on the down slope of the hill.

The firing below stopped as if cut with a knife. To the south the Mongols disengaged and rode madly away from the missile base.

“Come on!” Solo cried.

The one ready missile began to steam on its pad, began to shiver and shake as it prepared to launch.

Below all the firing had stopped now. The Mongols were gone.

General Po stood out in front of the control building staring off to where the Mongols had suddenly vanished. Then the general looked at the shivering, steaming missile.

The missile did not rise.

General Po just stood there.

The Chinese soldiers and workers began to run in a wild panic.

Slowly, gracefully, like a tall creature falling asleep, the missile began to topple over and exploded with a roar on its pad.

The explosion shook the ground like an earthquake. Buildings of the base crashed down, burned.

Solo and Illya lay behind the hill. Illya Kuryakin smiled.

“The warhead won’t explode. It wasn’t armed. I fixed that,” Illya said.
“We should be safe.

“Are you sure it won’t explode? The atomic warhead?” Solo said.

“Ninety-nine percent,” Illya said and grinned.

The two agents walked down to where the Mongols waited. The nomads had lost many men, but they were smiling.

Solo and Illya mounted small ponies and rode off with the nomad soldiers.

On the other side of the hill there were screams, and flames of fire rose into the sky.

Illya Kuryakin suddenly pointed north. "See that, Napoleon."

A helicopter rose into the air and suddenly swung northwest toward the Soviet border. Solo watched it.

"Maxine." Solo said. "I should have guessed. She saw you come out of the building, Illya. She guessed what was happening."

"And saved herself without telling anyone else," Illya said. "That's THRUSH."

"That's Maxine," Solo said.

And the agent grinned as he watched the helicopter fly steadily to the north.

A week later, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin sat in the comfortable office of Alexander Waverly. The unsmiling Section-I Chief searched in his pockets for a match to light his pipe.

"You did well," Waverly said, found a match, began to light his pipe. "Unfortunately, the Trent woman did escape. Our people in Siberia located the helicopter, but I fear she had long been gone."

"A report tells me that she has been seen drinking with the Albanian Embassy staff in Ulan Bator," and Waverly sighed. "Of course, we did not find her there. But I expect she'll turn up again."

"I expect she will," Illya said, "she just can't stay away from Napoleon."

"You are jealous," Solo said.

"Yes, well," Waverly said, puffed on his pipe. "The THRUSH plot was foiled completely, but I fear the base was inspected by the Chinese, and now there is a great deal of tension between the two factions. It seems Chairman Mao knows that General Po's faction worked with THRUSH. It looks like there will be a purge, possibly civil war. We must see if we can stop it or minimize it."

“You want us to go back?” Illya said.

“Perhaps. I shall have to study the matter. There is going to be a civil battle in China over this, and we may have to help. But meanwhile, gentlemen, take a vacation. Have a rest. Say, you will report back here in two days.”

“Thanks, sir,” Napoleon said drily.

“Unless I call you sooner,” Alexander Waverly said.

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin filed from the room. Waverly puffed on his pipe and stared thoughtfully at the wall. There was a bit of work to be done. And not much time...

